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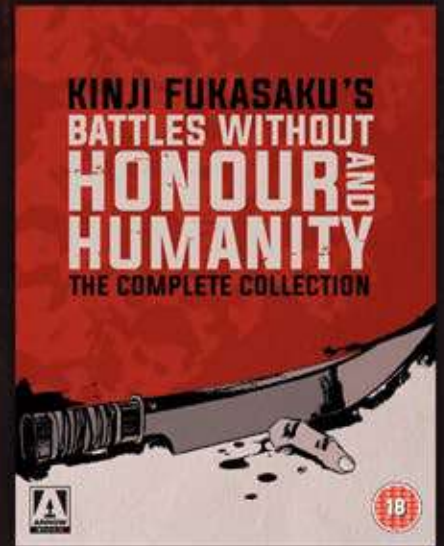
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 418!

I must confess to having being surprised at the success of the YA Fiction behemoth **The Hunger Games**. Katniss and co. have been around almost as long as I have been Editor of **STARBURST**, but all good things must come to an end. So before we say goodbye, it's only right that we devote this issue to **The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2** (kids these days, it's all about colonic sequels). We bring you a preview of the upcoming final instalment, and don't panic if you need bringing up to speed as we also take a look at the revolution so far. Whilst it is great to have Katniss on our Newsstand cover, you seriously need to get your hands on the Collectors' Edition before it sells out. The legend that is Mark Reihill has done us all proud with a very desirable piece of Katniss art. I know I always sing his praises, but this is one of my favourite pieces. The things this man can do with his fingers!

We also preview **The Hallow**, **The Good Dinosaur**, **Victor Frankenstein**, and **Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse**. It certainly is a busy month of releases. Still on the vein of horror, we join forces this month with our friends at **Horror Channel** to bring you a very special **Horror Obscura**. Join us on a sneak peek at the exciting line-up they have in store for you this Halloween.

Horror Channel and Horror Obscura A match made in Hell! Even more horror awaits with the long awaited **Ash vs. Evil Dead**. The return of Ash is imminent, and **STARBURST** is here to give you the lowdown on what to expect.

Very sorry (or cause for celebration?), but there is no **It's Only A Movie** until next issue. I was away on my hols spreading some misery in the States, but we do have all of your regular fixes of awesomeness, plus a report from the set of ITV's new genre show **Jekyll & Hyde**, and **Independents Day** chats to ex-**Primeval** star **Andrew Lee Potts** about his fabulous web series **Wireless**. It's a big fat **STARBURST** full of essential ingredients for your genre wellbeing.

Finally, it's the end of the summer, which can only herald the imminent return of the **STARBURST RADIO SHOW**. Allow me to thank you on behalf of everyone at **STARBURST** for voting for us in the **UK Podcast Awards**. It was a proud moment for all of us when we bagged the Award for Best TV/Film Podcast. That was all down to you guys, and we could not be more chuffed.

Watch out on Twitter or our website for the date the **STARBURST RADIO SHOW** returns to ruin your Wednesday evenings.



Until next issue,
Keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce
JORDAN ROYCE
EDITOR



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A MOFF TO THE FLAME

Dear STARBURST
Issue 416 is the first issue of your magazine I have both bought and read. This is significant as it is also the last. As a DR WHO fan, I was disgusted by the comments made by Paul Mount [in *The Moffat Factor*]. His views certainly do not reflect my own nor that of the vast majority of WHOvians around the world. I love Steven Moffat and yes, Mr Mount, I would describe his era as the golden age of the show.

Aside from anything else, Mount is ill-informed if not stupid. Ratings decline, he says. The program will never reach the high note of David Tennant again. Oh really? The facts and figures speak for themselves, sir. Most watched show on BBC America [2014] most downloaded on iTunes [2012], beating GLEE. Most downloaded on iPlayer [2010] that's before I even start with it being one of the most watched shows on BBC 1. Its figures remain unchanged since 2005. Of course, certain episodes will achieve more, i.e. regeneration stories, but overall the show remains exactly the same as it did 10 years ago. And you can't say that of many shows.

He speaks ill of *Let's Kill Hitler* [my favourite] and speaks as if he wants to play Moffat and Russell [T Davies] off against each other. You are aware both men are

friends? I have met Steven many times and never has there been a more charming, charismatic and friendly person you could wish to meet. He loves DOCTOR WHO. He is a fan. And I would wager understands it a lot more than Paul Mount. After all Moffat isn't the one writing for some second rate magazine, now is he? He goes on to say that fans have been taken in by Moffat's smoke and mirrors. I can assure you, sir that no one takes me in. I like what I like for its quality and find your comments more insulting to fandom than anything Moffat could ever say. It's a show about a weirdo in a police box that's bigger on the inside than the outside for crying out loud. Of course, it's nonsensical. Finally...

He feels that Matt had to contend with poor scripts. I would not describe *Impossible Astronaut/Day of the Moon, A Good Man Goes to War* and *Name of the Doctor* as poor. You are of course entitled to your opinion, so long as you know it's wrong, and I feel it a shame that STARBURST gives such a vile man a platform. Is Paul related to Katie Hopkins?

Kind regards,
Paul Clarke, from REDDITCH

STARBURST Editor Jordan Royce responds:

OK Paul, I was going to try to address this letter in a calm and civilised manner. A nicely measured response. Seriously,



I really tried, but some elements of this drivel that you have written made me unable to help myself. So I suggest everyone grabs themselves a nice beverage, sticks some popcorn in the microwave, and let's get started

At the offset, I want to clarify that the comments made by Paul Mount were just that his own personal comments. His opinion on a show that he has watched all of his adult life, and reviewed in this very magazine since the late 80s. He is entitled to his opinion, as you are entitled to yours. It is the pompous, and rude tone of your letter that just stinks, to be honest. You do not have to agree with Paul Mount's opinion, you can be irritated by it, but to write a letter referring to someone as a vile man, and calling us out as a second rate magazine makes me think that you need to get a grip and remember that it's a television program. You are a great example of the type of fan that gives not only DOCTOR WHO, but the whole genre a bad rep. Ignorantly shouting down any point of view that conflicts with your own puts people off even watching the show. Nevertheless, let's address a few of your comments, which have been presented as undeniable facts in a manner that Fox News would be proud of.

You state that the comments espoused by Paul Mount do not reflect the vast majority of WHOvians (is this term up for debate by the way?) around the world. You are incorrect. Myself, and the editorial team are subjected on a daily basis to the opinions of an international readership, a quarter of a million followers on Twitter, a Radio show, and a top ten iTunes podcast. Whether we ask for it or not, we are subjected to the prevailing wind of fandom, often at odds with our own personal views. Whilst there are many fans of DOCTOR WHO that adore the Moffat era of Who, there are many that totally despise it and cannot wait for him to leave. That was not as acute a case under the steerage of Russell T Davies. Since publishing the article that triggered your outrage, I have received countless letters, and tweets regarding the article. You are the solitary

letter that has sprung to his defence. To be completely fair, it is a safe assessment that fandom is much divided. Certainly not the Moffatopia that you paint with no evidence whatsoever, other than you saying it is so. This is hardly what anyone would portray as the Golden Era of any show. Most people would choose either the 70s Tom Baker era, or the first four initial series under Russell T Davies. Eras that attracted mass audiences and fans alike. Whilst Mr Moffat has written some fantastic episodes of DOCTOR WHO, the job of a showrunner is still to produce a television show that appeals to a mass audience, whilst simultaneously appeasing the show's long term fans. Mr Moffat has been clearly much more divisive in this respect than his predecessor. The ratings also support this position, which leads us nicely onto your second bone of contention

You state that the show remains as popular as it did ten years ago. That is simply untrue. A statement that falls apart under scrutiny by easily verifiable means. Paul Mount's assessment of the erosion of viewers under Steven Moffat is based in reality. I am as sad to see this happening (especially with the great Peter Capaldi in the titular role). Series Nine so far has been abysmal in ratings terms. Dropping from a poor 4.6 million, down to a worrying 3.7 million with only its second episode. It's beginning to get a bit pathetic listening to blinkered Moffat fans like yourself whining on about time shift, foreign viewers, iPlayer, wanting to include household pets, and people watching on Venus all in a state of desperate denial.

The show is indeed much more popular in the States; but in the UK, the mass audience it once commanded has deserted in droves over the last four years, and no amount of manipulating figures will change that. Let's be incredibly generous and double the amount of viewers from Saturday, September 26th, 2015, from 3.7 up to 7.4 million. That is half the viewers from the heyday of the Davies era. Being a fan of the show since four years

old I am gutted, but numbers are numbers. Is it all the fault of Mr Moffat? probably not, but you can understand why some fans think six years is enough, and maybe some new ideas are needed at this point to freshen things up. Like yourselves, those fans are entitled to their opinions.

Further on the subject of divisiveness, you mention *Let's Kill Hitler* as your favourite episode ever. An episode that is conversely my least favourite episode ever. I find it to be reminiscent of a 70s bedroom farce written in the style of his old sitcom *COUPLING*. I genuinely think the show jumped the shark at this point. The whole series based around the Impossible Astronaut I felt was similar bilge. It was terrifyingly apparent that your hero never had a clue how he was going to wrap up that story, made evident by a regenerating a Tesseract at odds with the shit bag shuffle of a conclusion in the series finale. That myself, you, and Paul Mount can have such differences of opinions adds weight to any lack of faith I currently have in Mr Moffat's ability to unify fandom, whilst retaining a mainstream audience.

As for your defence of Steven Moffat, and being obviously dead excited that you have met him a few times (I do hope you took some selfies), please note that Paul Mount never attacked him as a person. He just doesn't like his vision of DOCTOR WHO. Now we have got the pleasantries out of the way, there are a few other comments

I would like to make.

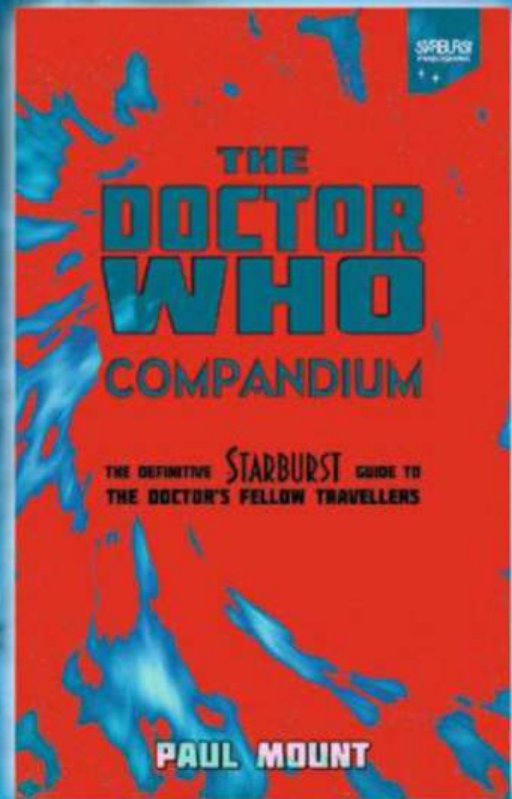
As I stated before, you have every right to be upset that a writer does not share your viewpoint. It is more than healthy to write a counterpoint (although some evidence to back it up would be useful to win people over). Also it's a bit rude, but I can live with the fact you consider us to be a second rate magazine that you will never read again. That's your assessment. The problem I have is with you calling Paul Mount a vile man.

Paul Mount has been professionally regarded by a wide readership for over a quarter of a century (sorry Mounty, they might now figure out you are over thirty!). He is massively respected by the readers, myself, and the entire Editorial Team. He is also a personal mate of mine. I have no idea what you hoped to achieve with your letter, but by resorting to personal attacks that you would never state to someone in person, you have presented yourself to be the type of keyboard warrior, that currently makes society, and the Internet almost unbearably unpleasant.

DOCTOR WHO is a television show. One that will likely still be around in one form or another after many of us have shuffled off this mortal coil. Stuff like this is tedious. It's like listening to fleas arguing over who owns the dog.

Congratulations for being Troll of the month, you have won a copy of THE DOCTOR WHO COMPANDIUM by Paul Mount!

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Winner: Nadz. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

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STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 419 ON SALE FROM NOVEMBER 20TH

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS

THINGS TO COME



MARVEL'S JESSICA JONES

MARVEL

Arguably the biggest Marvel movie news of this past month is that Chris Evans is now open to the idea of extending his time as the Sentinel of Liberty, Captain America. Despite some initial hesitation over signing on for the role in the first place, Evans committed to a six-film deal to play Steve Rogers. With four proper appearances to date (his *Thor: The Dark World* cameo doesn't count), that leaves only two more Cap turns as part of his current contract. One of those is next year's *Captain America: Civil War*, and Evans has confirmed that his last film under the current deal is set to be *Avengers: Infinity War – Part 2*. Make of that what you will, but that obviously suggests a Cap-shaped hole in *Infinity War – Part 1*. On the possibility of extending his deal, the actor has now gone on record to say that he'll continue to play the First Avenger for as long as Marvel wants him. Up next for Steve Rogers is a butting of heads with Tony Stark when Anthony and Joe Russo's *Captain America: Civil War* hits screens on May 6th. On a further *Civil War* point, Mark Ruffalo has revealed that The Hulk was initially planned to be a part of the film but that's no longer the case, with the apparent plan to prolong the Green Goliath's MCU absence in order to further the intrigue surrounding a character who was last seen jetting off into self-imposed solitary confinement at the end of this year's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

In an intriguing move, a rumour broke as we were going to print to say that Taika Waititi is in talks to direct the Thunder God's next outing, *Thor: Ragnarok*. Waititi is a huge talent, and the New Zealander is the man behind the fantastic *Eagle vs Shark*, the wondrous *Boy*, and the hugely amusing *What We Do in the Shadows*. He may also be familiar to genre fans for appearing

as Hal Jordan's best mate in 2011's much-maligned *Green Lantern*, but let's not hold that against him. *Thor: Ragnarok* is currently set for November 3rd, 2017.

Elsewhere in the MCU, Wesley Snipes has *again* talked about *good* conversations with Marvel about bringing Blade back to the big screen as part of the greater Marvel Cinematic Universe, adding that he's still fit enough for the role but that there's nothing concrete in place as of yet. This is, of course, on top of stories from earlier in the year that Snipes' Daywalker could be used as a way to introduce a new Blade in the form of the character's recently-created comic book daughter, Fallon Grey.

One new addition that we *do* know about is that the much-rumoured Rachel McAdams has finally been announced as being a part of Scott Derrickson's Benedict Cumberbatch-headlined *Doctor Strange*. No details are known on what role the *True Detective* actress will play in the film, but she joins a cast that currently includes Cumberbatch, Tilda Swinton and Chiwetel Ejiofor. Mads Mikkelsen is also still reportedly in talks to join the movie, which will see the Sorcerer Supreme magic his way on to screens on November 4th, 2016.

Switching over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, and the Channing Tatum-starring *Gambit* has again run into problems. With the star himself having nearly walked away from the film earlier in the year, this time the problems centre on the director. *Rise of the Planet of the Apes'* Rupert Wyatt has long been signed on to direct, but he's now officially left the project due to apparent scheduling conflicts. *Gambit* was set to start production later this month ahead of an October 2016 release, but obviously the departure of Wyatt now throws doubt over that.

One other departure that we've known about for a while now is Hugh Jackman leaving Wolverine's iconic claws behind with one final outing in James Mangold's sequel to *The Wolverine*. This month saw Jackman asked on who he'd like to see replace him as Weapon X, and his response was simple and to the point: Tom Hardy. This is the same Tom Hardy who's regularly touted as the next James Bond as well as being linked to any and all upcoming big roles, of course. Hardy's obviously no stranger to comic book properties, having starred as Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises* and also set to star in the upcoming *100 Bullets* adaptation. Jackman has seven Wolverine outings to date, and one final solo outing sees that figure definitely being upped to eight. Add to that the possibilities of appearances in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, Ryan Reynolds' *Deadpool*, and the aforementioned *Gambit*, and Jackman could have eleven Logan appearances to his name by the time all is said and done.

In the small screen Marvel realm, which exists as part of the greater MCU, the Netflix-exclusive *Jessica Jones* has finally been given a premiere date. The Krysten Ritter-starring show, which will also feature Mike Colter's Luke Cage, will be made available on the streaming service as of 12:01am on November 20th, 2016. After making his debut in that series, Colter's Cage will go on to headline his own show, which itself has added *Under the Dome*'s (and famously-yet-briefly *Pulp Fiction*'s) Frank Whaley as Detective Rafael Scarfe, a character directly from the comic books who has assisted Power Man over the years. *Luke Cage* is another show that is currently set to hit Netflix in the second half of next. Of course, this Netflix-exclusive Marvel drive began with the fantastic Charlie Cox-headlined *Daredevil* earlier this year. That show returns in 2016 for its second season, and this past month has seen Scott Glenn's Stick, the mentor of Matt Murdock, confirmed to return for Season Two. The Guardian Devil himself is set to have his hands full when the show returns, with The Punisher (Jon Bernthal) and Elektra (Elodie Yung) set to debut. *AP*



ALIEN: PARADISE LOST

Henceforth, **Prometheus 2** shall now be known as **Alien: Paradise Lost**.

Director Ridley Scott – riding high after the resoundingly positive response for his latest film **The Martian** [see review on page 74] confirmed the news and revealed that the new title is in reference to John Milton's famed work of the same name. The director explained, *You know the poem? I'm sure you've never been through it; the poem's a book, **Paradise Lost**. It sounds intellectual but there's a similarity to it. That's where it stops.*

On the decision to name it **Alien: Paradise Lost**, he later added, *Well, because we're heading back to why and how and when the beast was invented. We'll go back into the back door of the very first Alien that I did thirty years ago.*

The Paradise line is also something that has ties to the film in more detail, not least because the first film saw Noomi Rapace's Elizabeth Shaw told by her father that paradise is where dead people go, and then it's also believed that the new planet featured in this next movie has been dubbed 'paradise' by Scott and his crew.

As far as the plot of this first Prometheus sequel is concerned, all we know at this stage is that the film will feature a new planet that is the home of the first movie's engineers and that new creatures will play a part. Oh, and the engineer/alien hybrid seen at the end of Prometheus, apparently known as The Deacon, will play a larger role. **Alien: Paradise Lost** is looking to start shooting in January or February of next year ahead of a pencilled-in July 30th, 2017 release. AP

TRANSFORMERS

Thought that the **Transformers** movie franchise had run its course? Don't be silly... With a fifth live-action **Transformers** currently in development, not to mention an animated origin story, now comes word that there's seemingly plans in place for ten further years of Robots in Disguise action. This news comes after Hasbro Studios' Stephen J. Davis spoke at Cannes MIP Junior event.

Davis revealed, *Well, you're going to see a new **Transformers** movie coming from Hasbro and Paramount and Michael Bay and our other partners. In fact, we just finished, as some of you may have read, just an incredible experience. We decided that we wanted to plot out the next ten years of the **Transformers** franchise, so we got together in a room over a three-month period of time. Nine of some of the most creative writers I have ever worked with, shepherded by Akiva Goldsman, who many of you may know won an Academy Award for **A Beautiful Mind** and written a bunch of great movies. Similarly, we are doing the same in television and in digital. So stay tuned, **Transformers 5** is on its way, and **6** and **7** and **8**.*

So there we have it: don't be expecting to see the Autobots and Decepticons power down any time soon. Sure, Mark Wahlberg is to return to headline **Transformers 5**, with Michael Bay likely directing again, but is there really the need or want for **Transformers 6**, **Transformers 7**, and **Transformers 8**? We'll let you decide at the box office. AP

GHOSTBUSTERS

Not content with two **Ghostbusters** movies on the horizon, Sony is reportedly developing an animated film as well. Ivan Reitman, the director of the first two **Ghostbusters** movies, will serve as a producer on this cartoon effort, along with Tom Pollock.

Of course, the Ghostbusters have had their fair share of animated adventures over the years, with many a fan left with fond memories from **The Real Ghostbusters**, which itself ran from 1986 until 1991. Then came **Extreme Ghostbusters** in 1997.

Elsewhere, it's emerged that Paul Feig's female-driven **Ghostbusters**, starring Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon, Melissa McCarthy, Leslie Jones, and Chris Hemsworth, will now include cameos from Sigourney Weaver, Ernie Hudson, and Annie Potts (who played secretary Janine Melnitz) alongside the already-announced Dan Aykroyd and Bill Murray. None of them are expected to play their original **Busters** characters. It's currently set for a July 15th, 2016 release.

As well as that film, Drew Pearce has put a script in place for a Channing Tatum-headlined movie to follow Feig's film. AP

THE CABIN IN THE WOODS 2

As crazy as it sounds considering the way the film ended (not to mention the struggle to actually get the bugger to the screen), but it seems Lionsgate are keen to get director Drew Goddard on board for a sequel. He was quoted as saying: *"The funny part is, I don't think we planned that movie to do a sequel; but that being said, the fun thing about **Cabin** is, the rules are pretty crazy. And it seems he's actually considering it, I'm sure we could figure it out if we got inspired to. I know Joss and I both feel like we don't want to tarnish what we did with the first one. With a sequel, we'd only do it if it made us laugh hard enough, I suppose."*



The feature debut of Robert Eggers has already gained critical acclaim from Sundance and other high profile festivals. It's a classic story of 1630s New England community's struggle against the power of witchcraft and possession. Apparently lower key than TV series **Salem**, the buzz certainly has us conjuring up a devilish amount of enthusiasm and anticipation for its March 11th, 2016.

DC

When it comes to DC-based movies, all has been a little quiet on that front over this past month. The only real news is that there are now plans in place to develop a big screen team-up movie for the fan favourite duo of Booster Gold and Blue Beetle. Greg Berlanti, best known to genre fans for producing and developing the likes of **Arrow**, **The Flash** and CBS' upcoming **Supergirl**, is believed to be in line to direct the film, which is being described as a *superhero buddy cop movie*. Both Booster and Beetle are characters from the future. With Booster Gold being the alter-ego of Michael Jon Carter, initially from the 25th century, he's someone who travels back in time to the present day and uses his knowledge of future technology to become a cocky, sponsor-adorned, insta-smiling hero. As for Blue Beetle, Dan Garrett, Ted Kord and Jaime Reyes have all taken on the moniker over the years. Both heroes have previously been seen in live-action after popping up in an episode of **Smallville**. When it comes to this new take on the characters, some rumours are suggesting that the duo could even make a brief big screen appearance as soon as Zack Snyder's **Justice League: Part One** in 2017. Where the small screen DC properties are concerned, the biggest news there this month centres on first looks. New promos, teasers and trailers have brought a first glimpse at **DC's Legends of Tomorrow's** Hawkman and Hawkgirl, to be played by Falk Hentschel and Ciara Renée, respectively, whilst we've also been



given a look at **The Flash's** other Flash all suited up. That other hero, of course, is Teddy Sears' Jay Garrick, aka The Crimson Comet, aka the very first Flash. We've likewise been given the briefest of brief first looks at **The Flash's** second season 'big bad', Zoom, not to mention a new take of Firestorm. Franz Drameh's Jay Jackson character long been confirmed as a new addition to the shared world of **Arrow**, **The Flash**, and **DC's Legends of Tomorrow**, with speculation claiming that this version could be a take on DC's Static Shock, Black Lightning or Cyborg, but it's now been revealed that he'll become one element of a new take on Firestorm, a hero depicted as the combined might of Victor Garber's Martin Stein and Robbie Amell's Ronnie Raymond in Season One. Elsewhere, CBS' **Supergirl** has given us our first look at its villainous Red Tornado... which totally, totally doesn't look like a Power Rangers villain. Honest. Well, maybe just a little. **Arrow** and **The Flash** have now returned for their fourth and second years, respectively, whilst **Supergirl** hits US screens on October 26th (UK debut TBC) and **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** will arrive next year. To check out all of these 'first looks', be sure to head to starburstmagazine.com. ^{AP}

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

OCTOBER 20TH ZOMBIE FLESH EATERS (1979)

Lucio Fulci's infamous former video nasty is always a treat for those with the stomach for it. Screening fully uncut, it's an eye-splintering, shark fighting, neck-biting spectacle that's just the right side of schlocky to be a masterpiece. The boat can leave now, tell the crew.

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OCTOBER 31ST - HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH (1982)

The second film in the series screens the previous night, but this audacious third entry was misunderstood at the time, but is a hell of a lot of fun and worthy of its growing status. It also includes one of the most annoyingly infectious jingles of all time. It's almost time Gather round... The big giveaway is about to begin...

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NOVEMBER 1ST eXistenZ (1999)

One of the final proper body horror films from David Cronenberg, this mind-melting tale of video games, virtual reality, and espionage is a gooey, visceral hodgepodge; but it's a hell of a lot of fun. Stunning cast too: Jude Law, Christopher Eccleston, Ian Holm, Willem Dafoe and Jennifer Jason Leigh. Way ahead of its time, like most of Cronenberg's films. Also related: **Videodrome** (1983) screens on November 6th [see **STARBURST #416** for feature on that particular classic].

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NOVEMBER 13TH I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (2010)

While nowhere near as devastatingly impactful as the 1978 original, this gruelling remake still understandably attracted controversy. Like the original, it's not pleasant, but by being so relentlessly nasty it hammers home the true horror of the subject. The sequel airs a week later.

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There's also the usual smorgasbord of TV series to feast on, including more Classic **Doctor Who**, with this month's stories including William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, and Jon Pertwee altogether as **The Three Doctors**, as well as Pertwee's Time Lord facing off against **The Sea Devils** and **The Daemons**. If sword and sorcery is more your thing, however, the third season of **Hercules: The Legendary Journeys** coupled with Season Six of **Xena: Warrior Princess** will suffice.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

AND FINALLY...

It looks like it could be Hasta la Vista, Baby for the **Terminator** franchise again following the lacklustre response to **Terminator Genisys** according to reports. The planned sequels (yes, they were that confident that you'd all want more) have now been scrapped. In reality, the film has taken home \$440 million, although \$112 million of that came purely from China. It cost over \$150 million, and by the time all is said and done it will make a loss for Skydance and Paramount, surprisingly!

So, I'll be back?! Maybe, but just not any time soon.

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The sequel to the frankly awesome **Kingsman: The Secret Service** is set to start shooting in April of next year. A couple of stumbling blocks, however, are that the sequel is currently without a completed script, and that star Taron Egerton is due to commence work on **Robin Hood: Origins** as of February, which could conflict with the April start date for the **Kingsman** follow-up.

In fairness, it's believed that Egerton's schedule can be easily sorted, whilst Matthew Vaughn is currently well underway when it comes to working on a script for the sequel.

All that's known about this sequel at this stage is that, as per a reveal from Vaughn, the film will largely focus on an American version of the Kingsman agency depicted in the first film.

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Brendan Gleeson (**In Bruges**) and Jeremy Irons (**Dead Ringers**) will be joining Michael Fassbender in the upcoming **Assassin's Creed** adaptation. Gleeson is signed on to play the father of Fassbender's Callum Lynch, while Irons is the pater of **The Dark Knight Rises** Marion Cotillard's currently unnamed character. Both Fassbender and Cotillard are the leads in director Justin Kurzel's latest, **Macbeth**, which is fantastic, so hopes are high. The film hits UK screens on December 30th, 2016.

TTC 418 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth



THE HUNGER GAMES:
MOCKINGJAY
PART 2

PREVIEW

END GAME

BY JOHN TOWNSEND



THIS NOVEMBER, THE HIGHLY ENTERTAINING, YET DRAWN OUT STORY OF KATNISS EVERDEEN WILL REACH ITS CONCLUSION. WILL THERE BE ONE LAST ARENA-STYLE ENCOUNTER FOR THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION OR IS ALL-OUT WAR THE ONLY PATH TO SOME FORM OF RESOLUTION? IN THE CHARISMATIC AND BLOODY STAND-OFF BETWEEN THE HEROINE FROM DISTRICT 12 AND THE PASSIVE, HIGHLY AGGRESSIVE PRESIDENT SNOW, ONLY ONE CAN BE THE VICTOR. TIME TO FIND OUT WHO



Back in September 2008, the first book in *The Hunger Games* series was published. Author Suzanne Collins drew inspiration from the Greek myth of the Minotaur, which involves a king forcing his subjects to sacrifice their children, and Roman gladiatorial battles. With a little reality television-inspired framing thrown in for good measure, Collins had found the perfect literary cocktail; to date the trilogy has now sold over 65 million copies. Impressive. Six months after that first book was published, production company Lionsgate acquired the film rights and work began on adapting the books for the screen. The first movie, *The Hunger Games*, was released in March 2012 and broke box office records for having the largest opening weekend for any film that wasn't a sequel. The combined box office for all three films in the series so far tops \$2 billion. Impressive, indeed.

Now the end is approaching with *Mockingjay - Part 2* the final instalment in a story that started three years ago when Katniss Everdeen triumphed in the

arena; so began a chain of events that now threatens the existence of all the inhabitants of Panem.

This movie will continue the dark tone that runs through the previous films, but should also be very different in style, and even in genre. With no arena competition to focus on and the extensive politicising of *Mockingjay - Part 1* left behind in District 13, this film will concentrate extensively on one final mission: one all-or-nothing attack on the enemy. With Panem in chaos, and therefore vulnerable, Katniss leads a team including Gale, Finnick and the unpredictable Peeta into the heart of Snow's territory with just one goal in mind: to assassinate the President. Fundamentally, then, *Mockingjay - Part 2* will bear all the hallmarks of being a war film.

The move to more of a central action theme would counter the most common criticism levelled at *Part 1*. For many viewers, both those who were familiar with the books and those who weren't, the pacing was too slow. In deciding to separate the

final book in the trilogy, as is the trend with many series overly controlled by the accountants (even though it initially angered and threatened to alienate fans, *Part 1* took more than \$700 million worldwide), any sense of trepidation or peril was lost. Everyone knew there would be another film, leaving *Part 1* as a cinematic palate cleanser, if you will; something to be consumed with a notion of necessity before being allowed to sample the spectacular dessert. Too little happened in comparison with the action and excitement of the previous two films (everything was just too grey!) and while there was a greater intensity, it wasn't what many fans and critics were expecting or hoping for.

What carried that film through was the performances, with Jennifer Lawrence inhabiting a character she is now synonymous with, and one of the female icons of the 21st Century, supported by some of the best talent in Hollywood. More than any other series in the young adult genre, *The Hunger Games* has



attracted a genuinely power-packed cast. It would have been impressive for a highbrow Oscar contender to have attracted a line-up that includes Philip Seymour Hoffman, Julianne Moore, and Donald Sutherland, not to mention Woody Harrelson, Stanley Tucci, and Lawrence herself, let alone a genre film.

There is another Lawrence that should be receiving more of the plaudits. Director Francis has helmed the series since taking over from Gary Ross following *The Hunger Games* and this has given the films a necessary consistency. With one overriding vision, he has been able to plan ahead; to develop the themes so central to the book's success. Splitting the final instalment into two films was brave and a director less invested in the project and in the story itself may have lacked the conviction necessary to maintain the high standard of the films.

All things considered, the certainty is that *Mockingjay - Part 2* will be a success, and could break that billion dollar barrier

now achieved by only true blockbusters. *The Hunger Games* series has swept all challengers aside and has changed the young adult market for good. There is an abundance of books and stories either in the development stage or with the film rights already snapped up [see feature on page 20], all hoping to fill the gap Suzanne Collins' behemoth will leave behind but with this opportunity comes a warning. There are more failed franchise launches than successful ones (we're looking at you, *Mortal Instruments* and *Vampire Academy*) and with the passing of Katniss' story we could be witnessing the beginning of the end of this highly lucrative genre. *The Maze Runner* has one more film to come and *The Divergent Series* has two; both have garnered enough of a following, and been financially successful enough, to see their respective stories through to the end, but will there be another one to emerge? Rarely does a franchise receive praise from both critics and fans while maintaining a level at the box office that keeps studio executives happy. *The Twilight Saga* maintained an impressive box office throughout the course of its five films, but received

increasingly unfavourable reviews. *The Hunger Games* has not fallen victim to any form of backlash, possibly in some part due to the overwhelming popularity of its star, and looks set to be the only Young Adult property that has successfully been positively received by both cinemagoers and critics. So will the end of this series signify the death throes of the genre? With both *Divergent* and *The Maze Runner* series set to end within the next 18 months, time will tell, but it does seem a possibility.

If that proves to be the case, then *Mockingjay - Part 2* should be a fitting finale. At a time when Young Adult fiction and the films that follow carry a monopoly on dystopian futures, it falls on the most iconic character within the genre to bring this chapter of the genre to a close.

Let us raise a three-fingered salute as one...



THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2 will storm UK cinemas on November 19th.



THE REVOLUTION STARTS HERE... THE HUNGER GAMES

BY SOPHIE ATHERTON



WITH THE SECOND
INSTALMENT OF
MOCKINGJAY DUE,
AND THE HUNGER
GAMES REACHING
ITS CONCLUSION, WE
BRING YOU UP TO DATE
WITH KATNISS & CO. □

Three films in, with a box office gross of \$2.3bn it can be argued that *The Hunger Games* series is potentially the most successful young adult book adaptation to date. When it was published in 2008, *The Hunger Games* spent 100 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list and was soon joined by sequels *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* respectively. Already identified as the most anticipated film for autumn, ahead of *SPECTRE* and *The Martian*, *Mockingjay - Part 2* is set to be equally as successful as its predecessors. As we reach the final chapter in the franchise that outsold the *Harry Potter* series, we recap the story and take a closer look at the big differences between page and screen.

THE HUNGER GAMES

Naturally, the first film of any series serves to explain the premise, so here we are introduced to the idea of the Hunger Games, several of the twelve districts who participate in them, and the main characters. It is made clear that District 12 is deprived; Katniss and Gale have to hunt to feed their families, and Katniss' father is no longer around due to being killed in a mining accident some years previously. The politics behind the games is revealed, with the how and the why they came about and the hoops the tributes have to jump through to survive. Katniss manages to create a stir from the go, and it all started with that mockingjay pin.

When Katniss volunteers at the reaping to protect her sister, she captures the heart of many viewers due to the selflessness of this action. And when Primrose gives her the pin to protect her, neither of them realise the full extent of meaning behind the mockingjay. As the story goes, during the first rebellion the Capitol created mutated blue jays that were able to relay full conversations. The birds were named jabberjays and used to spy on the rebels; we actually see them in a scene in *Catching Fire*, in which Katniss and Finick are attacked by them broadcasting their screaming loved ones' voices. When found out, the rebels started feeding the birds false information, making the Capitol's attempt to infiltrate them look foolish. The Capitol then released the birds into the wild as they were no longer useful, and they mated with mockingbirds to create the mockingjay. The mockingjay represents the failure of the Capital and has since served as a reminder of their stupidity.

Katniss continues to defy what is expected of a tribute, showing her rebellious streak from the start. She shoots at the gamemakers when they pay no attention during her evaluation, and refuses to mix or kill the other tributes in the games by heading as far away from them as possible. It's her reaction to Rue's death that starts the spark of the rebellion, as she decorates her body with flowers before saluting her district as a mark of respect. This causes a riot and the Capitol's response is to try to assassinate her, but Haymitch warns that doing so will only create a martyr for the districts and suggests they give them hope of young love instead. Katniss' final act of defiance to the Capitol occurs at the end of the games when she and Peeta decide they would rather die together by eating poisonous berries than kill each other. Afterwards, it is made apparent to Katniss that she must continue this charade of being in love, because she hadn't convinced everyone that that was her reason for suggesting the berries.

As an introduction to the franchise, it proves very successful, leaving the audience wanting. A final shot of President Snow observing Katniss and Peeta returning to District 12 feels ominous, which is reinforced by the implied death of Head Gamemaker, Seneca Crane, who is locked in a room with a dish of the poisonous berries.

CATCHING FIRE

This highly anticipated sequel manages to break the disappointing tradition that we have seen many times before, and proves to be more successful than the first film. Despite rehashing the same ground, it offers a completely new story for



the audience, so that we are unable to predict what is going to happen. It's a more shocking film than its predecessor, with far more graphic violence - illustrated early on when a citizen of District 11 is executed for saluting Katniss and Peeta as they complete their victory tour. The scene in which Gale is whipped for tackling head Peacekeeper Commander Thread is intense too, not only because of the injuries he sustains, but the blood splashed on the Peacekeeper's uniform and shots of him sloppily wringing it off the end of his whip. This, along with Cinna's unexpected death because of the wedding dress he makes Katniss that turns into a mockingjay, ensures that the film is a step above its predecessor in terms of shock value and violence.

It is made clear from the start that Katniss and Peeta must act in love for the cameras, as President Snow explains to Katniss in one of the first scenes that not everyone found their story believable. Desperate to keep their loved ones alive, the pair continue to act as though they can't live without each other, even going as far as to get engaged on camera and fake pregnancy. President Snow remains unsatisfied and has them placed back in the games with existing tributes, thus guaranteeing that they will be terminated. Unbeknownst to him, the new head gamemaker is a part of a growing rebel alliance and has plotted to retrieve Katniss to become the face of the cause as the mockingjay.

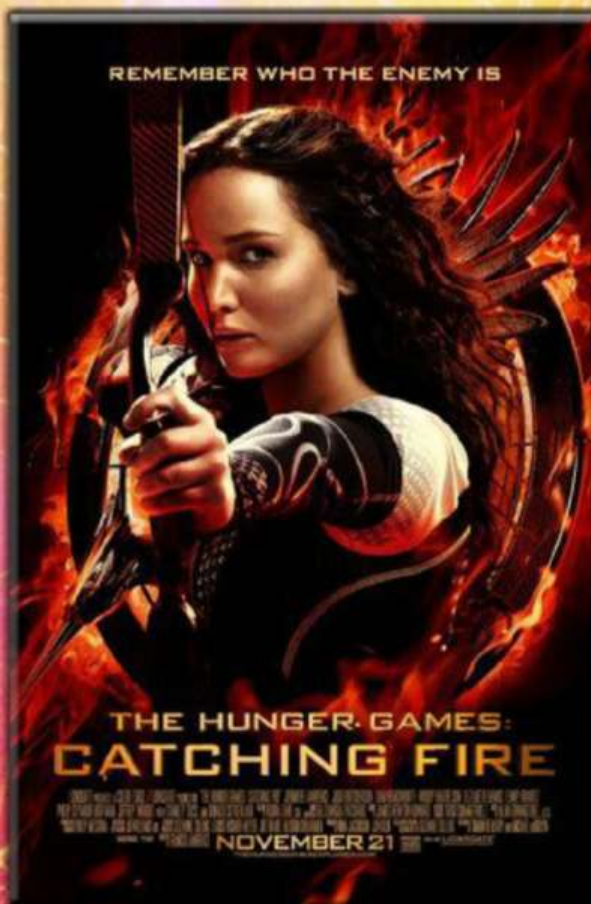
The close of the film sees Peeta held hostage of the Capitol, and District 12 reduced to rubble. The rebel base is at District 13, who have been hiding out underground for 75 years, waiting to launch an attack on the Capitol and begin the second rebellion. The final shot is of Katniss' furious but determined face, leaving the audience excitedly anticipating her reaction toward President Snow and the Capitol in the following film.

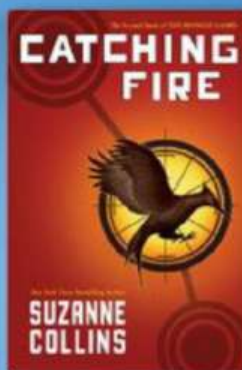
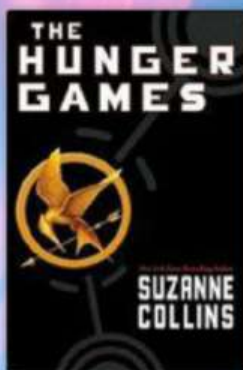
MOCKINGJAY - PART 1

The most recent film of the series is the most politically charged of the three, including rebel propaganda, prisoners of war, and democratic failures. It has even more shocking moments than *Catching Fire*, and even more political uncertainty. A slower film than the others, it focuses on what goes on behind the scenes of a war, showing Katniss' recovery and the propaganda involved with maintaining the rebellion. It also highlights that despite the star-crossed lovers story being a ruse, Katniss has fallen in love with Peeta, and desperately wants him rescued from the Capitol.

We see more of the other districts than previously too, with rebels killing Peacekeepers and blowing up the dam in District 5 that supplies the Capitol with power. Katniss is able to visit District 8 (as a part of her reluctant role as the mockingjay) which is immediately bombed by the Capitol for associating with her. Finnick then highlights the corruption behind President Snow's office by broadcasting his secrets across Panem, which, along with the revelation of what they have done to Peeta, increases the shock factor tenfold. The ending scene of Peeta desperately fighting against his hospital restraints after having his personality 'hijacked' and attempting to strangle Katniss is the sharpest cliffhanger yet and leaves the audience begging for more.

As the franchise has progressed, the endings have certainly become more compelling. Each film makes the audience more desperate to watch the sequel, and none more so than the shocking ending of *Mockingjay - Part 1*. It leaves us with so many questions; will Peeta ever return to his normal self? Will he keep trying to kill Katniss? Will she choose Gale or Peeta in the end? What other horrors have the Capitol committed? And will the rebels ever be able to overturn the Capitol? The wait is almost over, and that, unfortunately, means the end of one of the most successful Young Adult adaptations of today. But if the rumours are true, then we may be back in Panem again soon with potential prequels and sequels to the series being discussed. We can only live in hope.





DEVIATION OF THE GAMES

With the exceptions of minor changes expected in adaptations, cutting of minor characters, slight alterations to the narrative and the like, *The Hunger Games* trilogy has thus far remained very loyal to the original work. The first film is the most accurate, possibly because Suzanne Collins co-wrote the screenplay, with only a few changes, with the latter two made more progressively. Minor changes that fans were disappointed with include the exclusion of Katniss and Peeta's injuries from the first games. Peeta has to have his leg amputated as it never fully heals from the cut, and has a prosthetic one fitted, while Katniss loses her hearing after blowing up the supplies at the cornucopia. These injuries are likened to the injuries of war veterans and as they are excluded from the film, remove the links which are necessary in the books to reinforce the impact the games have on those who survive.

Another small change is the difference in the mutations in the finale of the first film. Mutations are genetically modified or mutated animals that often feature in the games, such as Jabberjays, Tracker-Jackers, and the Monkeys from *Catching Fire*. The wolves in the first film are mutations of the fallen tributes in the books. This highlights the horrifying extent the Capitol is willing to go to, which isn't revealed to the filmic audience until Peeta attempts to strangle Katniss at the end of *Mockingjay - Part 1*, because they have tried to modify him too. A variety of mutts feature in the second half of *Mockingjay*, so it will be interesting to see how many of these are translated from page to screen.

One of the big narrative changes is the cutting of a character called Madge, who is Katniss' school friend. This cut is significant because the effects ripple throughout the series. Madge is the one who gives Katniss the mockingjay pin in the book. There are several reasons why Madge could have been cut from the films. The first is simplification, which often happens in adaptations; characters are merged or excluded entirely to make the narrative flow more easily and less confusingly for the audience. The second is that by having Primrose associated with the symbol, it provides a more emotive link to the pin for the audience and the characters. And the third is that having the mayor's daughter associated with the pin proves a more complicated political storyline than intended for the films. Including Madge but not delving into her family history and the politics of how they associate with the Capitol and their District would be confusing for the audience that have not read the novels, and require a dramatic increase in her screen time.

The main cause for the differences between the books and films is that the narrative is told by Katniss in all of the novels, meaning she only speaks of what she knows as a witness, or has been told. As the film series did not choose to adopt this method of storytelling, it has been able to demonstrate feelings or rumours mentioned in the books in a more literal way. However, this also applies in reverse; while Katniss is not narrating we cannot know what she is thinking, which leaves some of the incidents up for interpretation. How she really feels about both Peeta and Gale has never been fully explained in the films, but is more apparent in the books.

In *Catching Fire*, a great deal of information is cut out about the tributes' previous games, including Haymitch's, and the audience is only given the information essential to the plot. Haymitch's games in particular would have been fascinating to see as it links into the history of Katniss' mockingjay pin and creates sympathy for his character and understanding for his chosen lifestyle. Similarly, the story behind *Mockingjay - Part 1*'s Hanging Tree song is never discussed, which has proved to be one of the most memorable aspects of the film. Much background information like this is excluded, and while this is most likely due to issues of timing, it takes from the richness of the narrative and the depth of many secondary characters.



THE YOUNG BOOKS: YA UNFILMED

by Ed Fortune

With the success of movies such as *DIVERGENT*, *THE HUNGER GAMES* and *TWILIGHT*, it seems that Hollywood has realised that Young Adult novels are an excellent source of ideas for sci-fi, fantasy and horror movies. So let's take a look at some of the more recent books that may well become the next big budget blockbuster; some of them even have movie deals already...

THE SHATTERED SEA Series

Joe Abercrombie

Lord Grimdark himself, Joe Abercrombie, created the *Shattered Sea* series to bring his unique brand of dark fantasy (made popular by his *The First Law* series) to a younger audience. A movie version would have to start with the first book, *Half a King*. It details the journey of Yarvi, the prince of a Viking-like society who has a malformed hand and a very sharp wit. After one very, very bad day, he finds himself left for dead in enemy territory and is quickly enslaved by people who don't know his heritage. It's a bloody story of betrayal and cunning, one that would appeal to anyone who liked *Game of Thrones*, but wanted it to be a little bit more accessible to younger people. The rest of the books in the series are similarly epic and its mix of magic and grittiness would make for good cinema.

Certainly it's likely that Joe would approve. He recently told *STARBURST* that he'd love to see a movie, especially as it would help him realise his dreams of having a *toilet seat carved from a single massive diamond*.

THE AWESOME

Eva Darrow

You may remember many moons ago that they made a movie version of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*; one that was very sub-par and completely missed the point (the TV series came later and pretty much established the franchise). Since then, teen vampire movies have devolved into the likes of *Twilight*. Monster hunting adventure story *The Awesome* is the tale of Maggie, a teenage girl who fights vampires, werewolves, and zombies for a living. It's a family business, her mom is also a slayer of horrors. Unfortunately, young Maggie isn't allowed to hunt vampires just yet; it turns out that bloodsuckers go crazy for the blood of virgins, so Maggie has to lose her cherry before she can get a full licence to kill the fanged fiends. It's a great pulpy read with lots of interesting characters (many of whom are surprisingly good role models because they're so honest and life-like). The series is fairly new but is already causing a stir, so it would be nice to see it on the silver screen.

THE INVISIBLE LIBRARY

Genevieve Cogman

Dragons! Gargoyles! Zeppelins! Alternate realities! Cogman's debut novel *The Invisible Library* introduces us to Library Agent Irene, who hops from reality to reality retrieving books for The Library, a pan-dimensional structure where all knowledge is stored. The Librarians are basically Time Lord-style secret agents with magical powers and kick-ass combat skills. Though the first book is a bit lacklustre in places, it's a fabulous setting and one that could be easily adapted to screen thanks to CGI. International

audiences ate up the high fantasy of the Harry Potter movies, and *The Invisible Library* has all that, plus half the book takes place in a steampunk-style London.

THE GHOSTS OF HEAVEN

Marcus Sedgwick

They don't make enough anthology movies anymore, which is one of the many reasons why they should turn Sedgwick's somewhat cerebral book into a movie. The novel is four intertwined stories that link in various thematic ways. The first tale is that of a woman discovering language and desperately trying to keep her tribe safe from predators while avoiding being seen as a witch by her friends. The next story is one of seventeenth-century witch hunts and man's distrust of change. This is then followed by a tale set in a 1920s insane asylum in which a mad poet's obsession with spirals drives his doctor crazy. The final story brings all the themes together and is set on a colonising spaceship. Despite the heavy sounding content, the writing style is firmly aimed at young adults. A movie version could easily be a Darren Aronofsky-style film aimed at teens, which would be an interesting prospect.

THE DEATH HOUSE

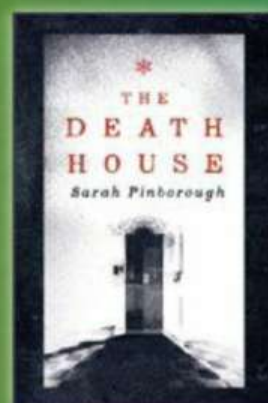
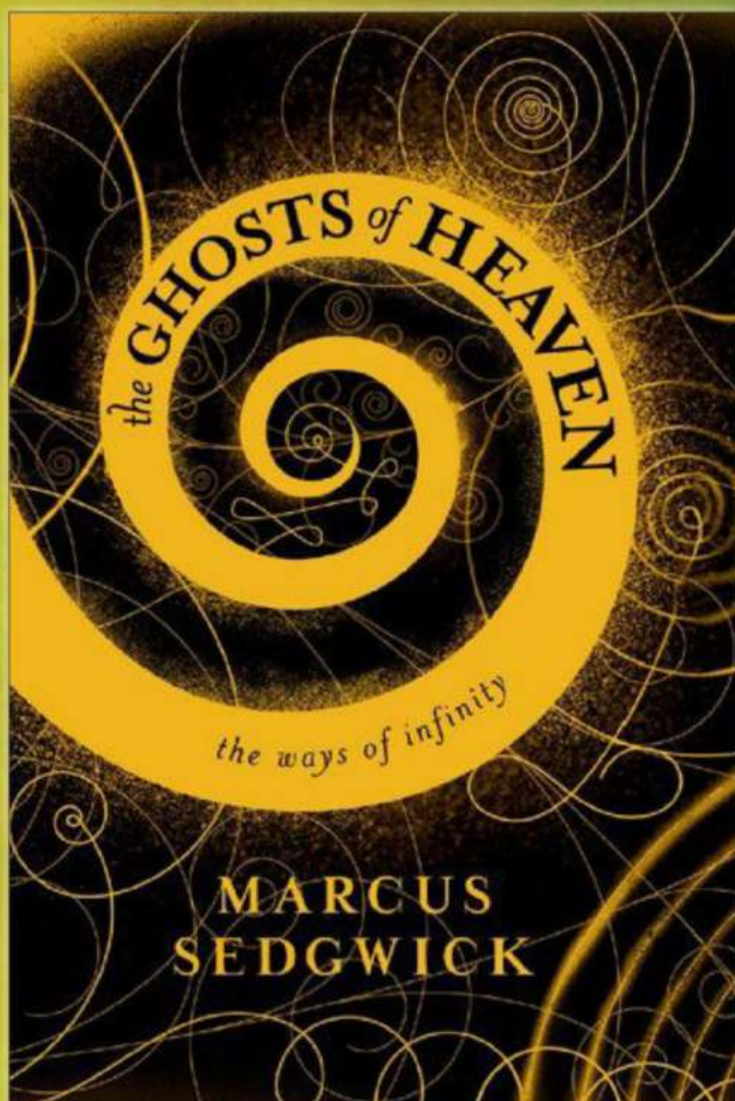
Sarah Pinborough

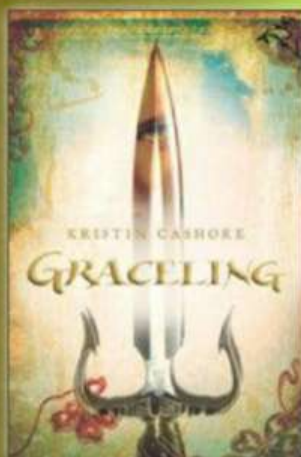
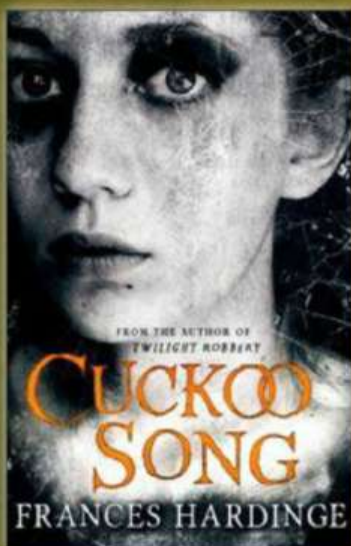
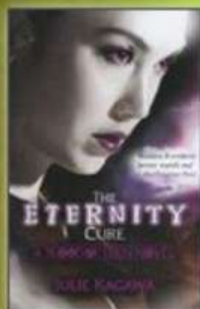
Video blogger and minor celebrity John Green wowed American audiences with his saccharine and deliberately manipulative novel, *The Fault In Our Stars*. This popular Young Adult book about two teenagers in love (who just happened to have terminal cancer) is an unabashed tear-jerker and was adapted into a similarly weepy and overwrought movie, popular amongst the *Twilight* crowd. *The Death House*, by one of the masters of horror, Sarah Pinborough, is the perfect antidote to this pabulum. *The Death House* is also about dying teenagers in love, but unluckily for them they live in a dystopian Britain and have been confined to a facility on a remote island while they wait to die. This tense and beautiful novel is one of Stephen King's personal favourites and could be turned into a brilliant spooky movie; just what the cinema needs. Give this to a director who wants to be the next Ken Loach or Alfonso Cuarón and we will have something truly special.

THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD AND EVIL

Soman Chainani

Universal have already picked up the film rights for this gloriously subversive fairy tale. *The School for Good and Evil* focuses on the exploits of Sophie and Agatha. Sophie has always wanted to be a heroic, fairy tale-style princess and Agatha is a loyal and homely friend. Sophie is outraged when she finds herself not at the School of Good (which trains princes and princesses) but at The





School of Evil, an academy for wicked witches and the like. With Agatha's help, the pair changes the rules of fairy-tale land forever. It's a rollicking good tale and very clever; the current rumour is that it will be an animated movie, honing in on the same sort of territory as the *Shrek* films.

THE BLOOD OF EDEN SERIES

Julie Kagawa

One of the authors who has done very well out of the recent fad for supernatural teen stories is Julie Kagawa, who wrote both *The Iron Fey* and *Blood of Eden* books. In the latter series, we meet Allison Sekemoto, a striking young woman who has also recently become a vampire. The books are set in a very *Mad Max*-like post-apocalyptic world. The devastation is due to a virus that has turned some into vampires and others into zombies (called Rabids). The human survivors either live in the wastelands (where they are free but in constant danger) or the cities where they have to donate blood and resources to their vampire rulers. Allison Sekemoto is a leather-clad, katana-wielding, motorbike-riding bad-ass who fights for those free humans looking for a city called Eden, where people can be free and safe. The movie rights have already been optioned, but it's seemingly in development hell.

THE RED QUEEN

Victoria Aveyard

This Young Adult book had the movie rights optioned even before the book hit the shelves; producers had seen the final manuscript and decided to get in early. It's easy to see why; this is a mix of some of the greatest hits from the YA book market. It has the romance of *Twilight*, the politics of *The Selection* and the action of *The Hunger Games*. The story is set in a world where people are either Reds or Silvers (defined by the colour of their blood). The former are normal people, whereas the latter have super powers and rule over the Reds. That is, until Mare Barrow comes along, a Red with lightning powers. She quickly becomes embroiled in a romance with the scion of a great house, as well as the politics of the state. The book is pretty generic and the ideas aren't anything new; this really is a remix of more popular works. The movie version may well be the same.

CUCKOO SONG

Frances Hardinge

Hardinge is one of those authors that critics, marketers, and snobs have a devil of a time trying to define. Her work has such a broad appeal that it makes it tricky to put an easy-to-advertise label on. Most commentators worth their salt agree that she writes simply marvellous and fantastical works, filled with the weird and wonderful. Her Young Adult novel *Cuckoo Song* is a post-WWI tale about a young girl who awakens with a terrible, terrible hunger. Triss can't stop eating and she seems to have the power to swallow anything at all, providing it's something she cares about. On the one hand, this is the tale of a family mourning the loss of a son, and on the other it's an incredibly creepy tale about being careful what you wish for. If done well, a movie version would be sure to give Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* a run for its money.

GRACELING

Kristin Cashore

Katsa was born with eyes that are different colours from each other, which in the world she lives in means that she has a special magical power, commonly called a grace. Unluckily for Katsa, her gift means that she is very, very good at killing people. Trained from an early age to be both an assassin and a spy, Katsa gets dragged into both shadowy politics and romance almost all the time. Many of the fans would love to see Maisie Williams in the role of Katsa, mostly because she looks a lot like the character in the books and there are obvious parallels between Katsa and Arya Stark from *A Game of Thrones*. The film rights to the series were picked up back in 2013, but since then we haven't heard anything else about the production. This hasn't deterred Kristin Cashore, who has carried on regardless by producing some great books.

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OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



BBC Announce New Spin-Off

The BBC has announced the commissioning of a brand new spin-off from **Doctor Who** due to enter production in spring 2016, for transmission on BBC Three (possibly in its proposed online-only incarnation) later in the year. The new series, executive produced by current **Who** showrunner Steven Moffat and executive producer Brian Minchin, is called **Class** and will be written by acclaimed Young Adult author Patrick Ness. The series is set in and around Coal Hill School, which long-time fans will remember as where the series began back in 1963 and that, more recently, has reappeared as the school where the Doctor's current companion Clara Oswald works. The new series is described by the BBC as: "A YA series set in contemporary London. Incredible dangers are breaking through the walls of time and space and with darkness coming, London is unprotected. With all the action, heart, and adrenalin of the best YA fiction (**Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, **The Hunger Games**), this is Coal Hill School and **Doctor Who** like you've never seen it before."

Moffat says: "No one has documented the dark and exhilarating world of the teenager like Patrick Ness, and now we're bringing his brilliant storytelling into **Doctor Who**. This is growing up in modern Britain - but with monsters!" Ness is clearly enthusiastic about the new project. "I'm astounded and thrilled to be entering the **Doctor Who** universe, which is as vast as time and space itself," he says. "There's so much room there for all kinds of amazing stories, and to work with Steven Moffat and Brian Minchin to find a place to tell one of my own has been an absolute joy. I can't wait for people to meet the heroes of **Class**, to meet the all-new villains and aliens, to remember that the horrors of the darkest corners of existence are just about on par with having to pass your A-Levels."

Damian Kavanagh, Controller of BBC Three, adds: "We're excited to give Patrick Ness this opportunity to work with us at BBC Three and the **Doctor Who** family. Patrick understands young audiences and I'm delighted he will use his incredible skills as a storyteller to delight audiences on BBC Three. BBC Three will always innovate and offer opportunities for brilliant new talent."

The series will consist of eight forty-five-minute episodes and it seems likely that the show will keep the **Doctor Who** production team largely in place if the rumoured gap year in production of the parent series (see **OTB** #416) comes to pass. No word on yet on casting or storylines, but **Outside the Box** is willing to bet its collection of Weeping Angel action figures that some familiar old props and prosthetics will be dragged out of the BBC Wales Costume Department and dusted down as the series progresses. The series will film in and around Wales as usual.

Jenna Jumps Ship

Jenna Coleman has finally confirmed, after much speculation, that Series Nine of **Doctor Who**, currently airing on BBC One, will be her final run of episodes as Clara Oswald (although what's the betting she'll crop up in **Class** somewhere along the line?). The BBC confirmed on September 15th that the actress will be moving on - she was originally expected to leave the series at the end of Series Eight, but changed her mind at the last

minute necessitating a rewrite to the ending of the 2014 festive special **Last Christmas**. Coleman has already been cast in a leading role in ITV's new high profile Sunday night drama **Victoria**, which chronicles the life of Queen Victoria. Rumours that Clara might meet a grisly end in the series have, however, been scuppered by the actress saying, "I would always be happy to return if there was a good story... but I think we'll have to wait and see what happens." Jenna Coleman made her first appearance as an incarnation of impossible girl Clara Oswald in September 2012, before teaming up properly with Matt Smith's Doctor in March 2014. She has remained in the series ever since, overseeing the transition from Smith into twelfth and current Doctor, Peter Capaldi.

Missy Goes Miniature!

Character Options, who have been producing 5-inch and, more recently, 3.75-inch **Doctor Who** action figures since 2005, have announced the release of a pair of limited edition - just 4,000 of each, folks - 5-inch figures depicting Missy, the female incarnation of the Doctor's bitterest enemy The Master, as played by Michelle Gomez in recent episodes of the TV series. The figure will be available in two variants: a purple outfitted version with hat from the eighth series' finale episodes, and alternatively in her *Heaven* outfit, hatless with black jacket and manic grin. The Missy figures each have 18 points of articulation. Each figure's head can also be swapped so that both heads can be incorporated with either outfit, and they both come with accessories. The figures are now available exclusively from character-online.co.uk (or, at a push, eBay before too long).



DOCTOR WHO DVD News

Christmas has come early for **Doctor Who** fans with the release this month of a special limited edition DVD/Blu-ray box set entitled **Doctor Who The Ten Christmas Specials** which, extraordinarily, collects all ten festive special episodes screened on BBC One on Christmas Day since 2005, commencing with David Tennant's debut *The Christmas Invasion* and concluding with 2014's *Last Christmas*. The set will include a special feature introduced by comedian (and Series Nine guest star) Rufus Hound looking back at the best moments from the episodes, with special recollections from Steven Moffat and Peter Capaldi as well as a selection of five illustrated Christmas cards and a souvenir booklet. Be warned: this set – available now – also includes the 2011 special *The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe*, so purchasers are advised to approach with extreme caution.

As reported last month, October 26th sees the long-awaited release on DVD of the last two episodes from the classic series, as the early Patrick Troughton four-part adventure *The Underwater Menace* finally sees the light of day, its two missing episodes replaced with reconstructions consisting of off-screen telesnaps taken at the time of the serial's original transmission. Special features are confirmed as part two of the *The Television Centre of the Universe*, the first part of which appeared on the special edition of 1982's *The Visitation, Fishy Tales* (a making-of documentary), commentary on the two restored surviving episodes by Anneke Wills and Frazer Hines (Polly and Jamie) with contributions from sound engineer Brian Hodgson and actress Catherine Howe (Ara in the serial), all moderated by superfan Toby Hadoke (see **STARBURST #384**) as well as the usual subtitles and production notes. Finally, the first six episodes from Series Nine arrive on DVD/Blu-ray on November 2nd (the final episodes will be released early in 2016) as **Doctor Who: Series Nine, Part One** and each episode will include a *Doctor Who Extra* behind-the-scenes featurette in the style of the programmes transmitted online in the wake of the screening of season eight's episodes last year. A full season box set is expected to be released later in 2016.



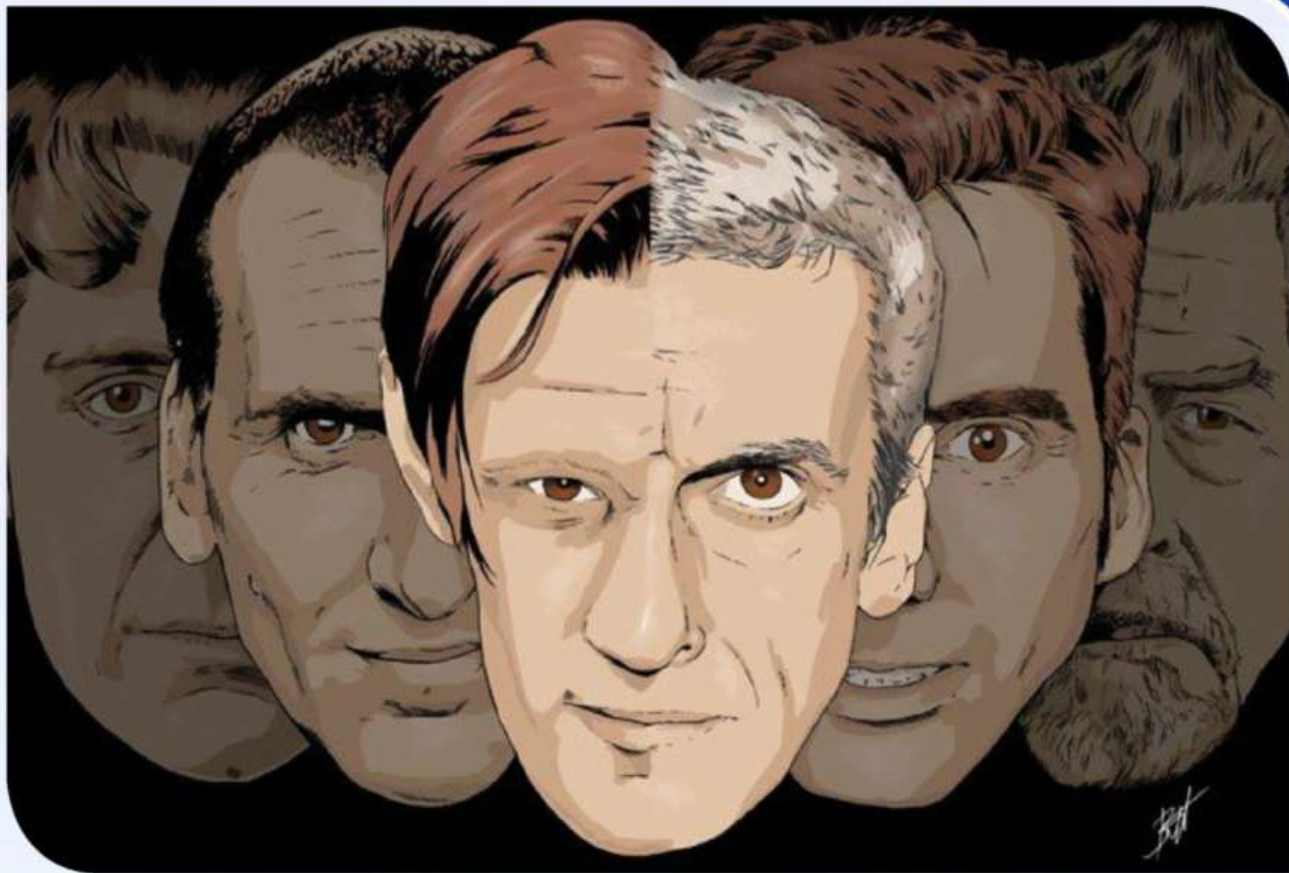
DOCTOR WHO in Ratings Crisis?

Doctor Who's ninth series made an inauspicious start in the weekly UK TV ratings with the first episode, *The Magician's Apprentice*, attracting an on-the-night audience – including viewers who recorded the episode and watched it later in the same day (known as VOSDAL – Viewing On Same Day As Live) – of just 4.58 million viewers, significantly down from the 6.8 million viewers who turned in to see *Deep Breath*, the first episode of Series Eight, which introduced Peter Capaldi in September 2014, and the lowest overnight figure reported for the show since its revival. Final consolidated figures including viewers who 'timeshifted' the episode to watch at their leisure later in the week saw the number rise to a more respectable 6.54 million viewers, with the BBC reporting that the episode also enjoyed 1.3 million unique viewings through its iPlayer facility – although it should be noted that viewing through the iPlayer is often counted in the timeshift figure and there is no way of clarifying how many of these viewings were unique and not repeat viewings. The consolidated figure remains well below the final figure of 9.17 million viewers who watched *Deep Breath*. Second episode *The Witch's Familiar* fared even worse, tumbling to 3.7 million viewers, although within several days of the screening the figure had risen to 5.4 million with the final consolidated figure (which we will confirm next month) expected to settle at around 5.7 million viewers. **Doctor Who** is facing unique competition this year with the second episode – and indeed episodes three and four – screening opposite a live televised match from the 2015 Rugby World Cup. *The Witch's Familiar* found itself screened directly opposite the hugely popular England versus Wales match, which attracted an overnight peak figure of upwards of 11 million viewers.

Whilst it's true that the way audiences experience television has changed significantly since **Doctor Who** returned in 2005 to the extent that it's now almost impossible to estimate exactly how many people enjoy any particular episode of any particular series, it does seem that the show is suffering a certain amount of audience leakage and it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the series is beginning to lose its grip on the nation's popular consciousness – perhaps hardly surprising ten years into its reappearance. It also seems likely that Peter Capaldi is not yet as widely accepted as his predecessors Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant or even Matt Smith and that the style of the series under showrunner Steven Moffat is also not chiming with the audience in the same way as his own predecessor Russell T Davies. The show's AI – Audience Appreciation – figures remain fairly stable at 83, down from the figures of between 86 – 88 which the series enjoyed a few years ago, now firmly placing the series in the audience appreciation 'good' category rather than 'excellent'. With the series facing further strong competition in the coming weeks, ratings are likely to remain subdued for the foreseeable future and **Outside the Box** will continue to report on the series' overnight/consolidated figures in future issues.

WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



Is every Doctor Who the same man with each new regeneration? In onscreen fictional terms, it would appear not. As the Ninth Doctor tells Rose in *The Parting of the Ways*, "Every cell in my body's dying. Of course, as human beings the same process happens to us – except it takes seven years for the body to undergo a complete cellular renewal, and it's a gradual procedure. If all the cells were to die at once, we would be dead; and if all the cells were replaced at the same time, we'd be a different person. If all the cells were to be born anew at the same time, a new man would be born – with the memories, triggers and instincts of the old man, maybe, but a new man nevertheless.

(This reminds me a little of matter transmission, as seen in the likes of *Star Trek* and *The Sontaran Experiment*. It helps to facilitate the drama without bogging it down in detail, but basically a transmat involves tearing the body apart cell by cell at one end of the process – thus killing the person you're transmatting – before rebuilding a new body at the further end of

the process – thus creating a new human being. One with the memories of the old, certainly, but the same person?)

It would seem that in fictional terms – at least since Russell T Davies began writing *Doctor Who* – we can regard the thirteen Doctors as individuals in the truest sense, with only a common history between them, rather than a common life. The Ninth Doctor really is saying goodbye to Rose at the end of Series One, and David Tennant's character really is a brand new Doctor. Regeneration truly is the end for the incumbent Doctor, then – and each new Doctor really is a newborn, with the potential to be as different a person from the last as the next will be in due course.

Off-screen, behind the scenes, this situation is even more pronounced. The actors who play the Doctor are, quite evidently, different people. However, is that all there is to it? Terrance Dicks seemed to think not, necessarily, saying that as a scriptwriter you could write the same words for any of the Doctors, and it would be for the individual actors to put

their mark on them in the interpretation. Hence Tom Baker bringing bags of Fourth Doctor goodness to *Robot*, in spite of Dicks' fairly nondescript apprehension of the character. In other words, according to Dicks, while the personality might have changed, the character remains the same.

Steven Moffat would appear to concur, having written ostensibly similar dialogue for six different Doctors now, with only the performances of the likes of Paul McGann and Peter Capaldi to distinguish between them and David Tennant and Matt Smith. In *The Night of the Doctor*, McGann performs dialogue that wouldn't feel remotely odd coming from the mouth of Smith (or any of the others), and yet it's McGann's playing of it that gives it its idiosyncrasy. The same is true of Hurt's dialogue in the anniversary special itself ("What are you going to do, assemble a cabinet at them?" is barely any different than "Bring me knitting!" – and both lines have the ring very much of the new series).

The funny thing is, when you look more closely at what Steven Moffat has

done, a different picture emerges – one that he made (almost) explicit with John Hurt's version of the character in *The Day of the Doctor*. When the War Doctor asks, upon meeting his future selves, if he's having a mid-life crisis, Moffat's script explicitly tackles one of the problems many old school fans had been having with the modern series, that of the Doctor being cast as younger (and ostensibly more virile) than had generally been the case. But by categorising Tennant and Smith's interpretations as superficially the same, Moffat neatly drew attention away from their differences. Because while Russell T Davies' two Doctors shared a common humanity – an emotional core that the watching audience could recognise and feel affinity for – Moffat's two main Doctors have struck out in an entirely different direction.

The Doctor might have been purportedly an "alien" ever since we encountered him in Totter's Lane (or shortly thereafter; the exact moment at which we discover he's not of this world is open to question), but it wasn't until Tom Baker took the part that any of the actors to portray him have played the part as such. For all of Hartnell's irascibility, Troughton's capriciousness and Pertwee's pomposity, Baker was the first to play the Doctor with more than just a surface eccentricity, and to actually imbue the character with genuinely inhuman seeming qualities. But by and large, just as Dicks had observed, this quality was in the interpretation, rather than in the writing – with one or two exceptions, *Pyramids of Mars* chief among them.

Steven Moffat's first Doctor, on the other hand, is very ostentatiously not human. We don't see this immediately; *The Eleventh Hour* is a changing of the guard story, and Moffat's vision for *Doctor Who* is introduced gradually rather than potentially alienating viewers by appearing all at once. But the Eleventh Doctor's reaction to Amy Pond's initial decision in *The Beast Below* and subsequently her advances at the end of *Flesh and Stone* are an indication of what is to come, and by *The Lodger*, the new regime is established



enough to create an entire story around a subject that the original series would never have dreamed plausible.

The Eleventh Doctor's lack of recognisable human qualities is perhaps at its most obvious during Series Six, particularly in his out of sequence association with River Song. Like a rabbit caught in the headlamps, his miscomprehension of the relationship between the two characters is more than just shyness writ large; it is instead a fundamental part of his characterisation – the inability to relate to human beings on their own terms. When we later see him slicking his hair and adjusting his bow tie ahead of a "date" with Song in *The Angels Take Manhattan*, what we are watching is a Doctor who is attempting to humanise himself, out of a misplaced assumption that this is what's expected of him.

It's just a stone's throw away from the Twelfth Doctor later waiting in Clara's bedroom when she arrives home with Danny Pink, in the belief that this is the last place she'd take a date.

The latest Doctor might be far more visible in his inability to fathom human beings – and with the hugging in *The Magician's Apprentice* we're already seeing a softening of the initial rawness

of this aspect of him – but essentially all that Moffat has done has been to look at the alien Doctor he'd created with Matt Smith's incarnation from a slightly different angle. Peter Capaldi is playing a Doctor who likes human beings but isn't *like* human beings, every bit as much as Matt Smith was. The quality the two interpretations share, in spite of the vast difference in age between the actors, is the sheer amount of childlike abandon they occasionally display with it. Whereas in *Pyramids of Mars*, the Fourth Doctor realises that his actions, his apparent lack of empathy, will upset people, neither the Eleventh nor the Twelfth Doctor even appreciates that he is exhibiting any notable difference, let alone cares. The two Doctors share an innocence in this regard that springs from the page, rather than being wholly in the actors' interpretation; Steven Moffat has taken an aspect of the original series that was always somewhat nebulous, in spite of its citation by fans as being an essential feature, and has made it a fundamental element of his writing.

Terrance Dicks might have been correct about writing the same Doctor and allowing the actor to bring his own interpretation to the part, and basically that's still what's happening now; Capaldi's very distinct lines could easily have been uttered by another actor and that same quality of alienness would have been played in a vastly different way – indeed, Matt Smith managed to make something ostensibly quite similar feel much cuddlier by comparison with his successor. But since the turn of the last decade, we've actually been watching a different kind of Doctor, distinguishing the last two incarnations from the ten that preceded them and, in an odd way, making the programme more plausible by doing so.

Unfortunately, plausibility doesn't always play well with an audience that will generally seek to empathise with the characters it's engaging with, and it remains to be seen whether Peter Capaldi's rather caustic and extremely alien Twelfth Doctor will continue to be as successful as his immediate predecessors.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





THE DALEK DILEMMA

Now that we've seen one Peter Doctor - Capaldi - come close to helping Davros bite the bullet, hindsight will allow us to look back at the time Peter the Elder - Davison - nearly followed suit! For possibly the best batsman in the known universe (evidence for which can be seen in *Black Orchid*), his chance to turn executioner came during *Resurrection of the Daleks*!

Just not cricket, you might think. Which made the moment all the more shocking. For just one incarnation earlier, a monumental attack of conscience had caused him to abandon any plans of ridding the universe of the former chief scientist of the Kaleds and his creations...

"A genius a man who was king of his own little world. You'd like him."

DOCTOR: Do I have the right? Simply touch one wire against the other and that's it. The Daleks cease to exist. Hundreds of millions of people, thousands of generations can live without fear, in peace, and never even know the word Dalek.

SARAH: Then why wait? If it was a disease or some sort of bacteria you were destroying, you wouldn't hesitate.
DOCTOR: But if I kill, wipe out a whole intelligent life form, then I become like them. I'd be no better than the Daleks.

And if anything, his new younger-looking post-*Logopolis* face/personality was often to be found grappling with the bigger questions, the most human of the lot unable to both metaphorically and literally keep it under his hat - in this case a gentlemanly Panama. Was Peter C taking

notes from Peter D, you might wonder?

You asked me if you're a good man and the answer is, I don't know. But I think you try to be and I think that's probably the point.

Anyone watching on the evening of February 8th, 1984 might have been given cause to ruminate on that very point. But typically, the Fifth Doctor threatened violence only as a last resort.

DOCTOR: I'm not here as your prisoner, Davros, but your executioner.

DAVROS: Listen to me. You, in your way, are not an unambitious man. Like me, you are a renegade.

DOCTOR: Save your breath.

DAVROS: I had planned to completely redesign the Daleks. Kiston will confirm I am telling the truth.

KISTON: It is so.

DAVROS: My mistake was making them totally ruthless. It restricted their ability to cope with creatures who rely not only on logic, but instinct and intuition. That is a factor I wish to correct.

DOCTOR: And compassion? Are they to be programmed for that?

DAVROS: They will learn to recognise the strength that can be drawn from such an emotion.

DOCTOR: But only to make the Daleks more efficient killers.

DAVROS: To make them a more positive force.

DOCTOR: For destruction!





DAVROS: *The universe is at war, Doctor. Name one planet whose history is not littered with atrocities and ambition for empire. It is a universal way of life.*
DOCTOR: *Which I do not accept.*

Ultimately, pacifism wins out, as he's unable to bring himself to pull the trigger.

To be honest, I wouldn't know what to do with an army.

A fact that Davros attempts to use as a stick with which to beat him.

DAVROS: *You hesitate, Doctor. If I were you, I would be dead.*
DOCTOR: *I lack your practice, Davros.*
DAVROS: *You are soft, like all Time Lords. You prefer to stand and watch. Action requires courage, something you lack.*

Just three episodes prior, back at the start of Series 21, he had been similarly forced to consider tactics he'd come to regret in thwarting the combined might of the

Silurians and their Sea Devil cousins. After quite a high body count at Sea Base 4, he's full of what might have been...

DOCTOR: *Did I succeed?*
TEGAN: *Yes, Doctor.*
TURLOUGH: *They're all dead, you know.*
DOCTOR: *There should've been another way.*

Turning back to the Daleks, it seems the horrors of the Time War changed his outlook somewhat. Confronted with the lone survivor from the other side of the conflict a good four bodies later, having swapped his blonde locks and Edwardian cricket gear for a closer shave and a leather jacket, it seems he's not in such a forgiving mood!

DOCTOR: *You're just a soldier without commands.*
DALEK: *Then I shall follow the Primary Order, the Dalek instinct to destroy, to conquer.*
DOCTOR: *What for? What's the point? Don't you see it's all gone? Everything you were, everything you stood for.*
DALEK: *Then what should I do?*

DOCTOR: *All right, then. If you want orders, follow this one. Kill yourself.*
DALEK: *The Daleks must survive!*
DOCTOR: *The Daleks have failed! Why don't you finish the job and make the Daleks extinct. Rid the Universe of your filth. Why don't you just die?*
DALEK: *You would make a good Dalek.*

An assertion repeated by Rusty in *Into the Dalek*. Lest we forget he's come perilously close to their line of thinking before, as if threatening to shoot a young boy - even if he is diddy Davros - shows us.

DAVROS: *Are you going to save me?*
DOCTOR: *I'm going to save my friend the only way I can. Exterminate!*

And we've heard similar before, leading to the not unreasonable question of whether the Doctor might not be as different from those he first encountered on Skaro all those years, and indeed bodies, ago.

DALEK: *I am alone in the universe.*
DOCTOR: *Yep.*
DALEK: *So are you. We are the same.*
DOCTOR: *We're not the same! I'm not...*
No, wait. Maybe we are. You're right. Yeah, okay. You've got a point. Cause I know what to do. I know what should happen. I know what you deserve. Exterminate!

So, a grey area. But as the Eleventh Doctor so keenly reminded them soon after unveiling an even younger face than Davison's, belonging to one Matt Smith: *"You are my enemy! And I am yours. You are everything I despise. The worst thing in all creation. I've defeated you, time and time again. I've defeated you."* The answer to *"What does hate look like?"* would appear to be far from clear cut, however!

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



TERROR OF THE SONTARANS

PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / AUTHOR: JOHN DORNEY, DAN STARKEY /
STARRING: SYLVESTER MCCOY, BONNIE LANGFORD, DAN STARKEY /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After receiving a distress call, the Seventh Doctor and his companion Mel arrive at an abandoned and derelict mining planet, which not too long after their arrival, gets overrun by a Sontaran battle fleet

searching for their missing research team.

As they begin to find the answers, strange occurrences start developing on the planet that are connected to a mysterious force that's hiding from within its confines and attacking its prey's minds.

Since their TV revival in 2008, the Sontarans, whilst still war-hungry brutes, became more comedic, and have recently been absent except for Strax and his adventures with the Paternoster Gang. Here, we do see a return to the Sontarans of old, living up to their description of being 'nasty, brutish and short'. Dan Starkey (who has also co-written this story with John Dorney) is to the Sontarans what Nicholas Briggs is to the Daleks and Cybermen; he understands the creatures inside and out, and here, he doesn't make them sound identical to one another or make them sound like 'new series' Sontarans, instead going for the chillingly raspy voice once used by original actor Kevin Lindsay; there are definitely flashes of Lindsay in Starkey's portrayal of the Sontarans.

Despite the title, the Sontarans aren't the only major threat in the story, and whilst the new monster that's introduced is unique, it still feels like you've seen the concept before somewhere else. The story itself does play out like the good Doctor Who stories of the eighties, and whilst it's both entertaining and engaging, it's not quite up there with the best of Big Finish's work and it falls into the age-old Doctor Who problem of the resolution feeling rushed and a little flat. Sylvester McCoy still brings gravitas to proceedings and Bonnie Langford always engages despite not being given enough space to shine, while both Daniel O' Meara and Andree Bernard are solid supporting players.

Terror of the Sontarans has a good mix of the old and new, and offers a good demonstration of why the Sontarans are as much a classic monster as the Daleks and the Cybermen. Even though it's not quite spectacular, it's an enjoyable ride and it provides the perfect way to close off the recent trilogy of adventures with the Seventh Doctor and Mel.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE TIME LORD LETTERS

AUTHOR: JUSTIN RICHARDS / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The market for Doctor Who books is thriving and more titles appear every

month than you can shake a sonic screwdriver at. Into what might be regarded as a rather crowded (time and space, Justin Richards has put together one more, Time Lord Letters.

Justin Richards is no stranger to Doctor Who books, having written many books (fiction and non-fiction) and audiobooks for everyone from Virgin New Adventures, to BBC Books and Big Finish, as well as being Creative Consultant to BBC Books.

Time Lord Letters is audacious in its simplicity; as the Doctor has wandered around the fourth dimension, he has written various letters around the edges of his many adventures, or had letters written to him. These cover all series of the show and a whole host of moments from various end of story departures, notes to companions left behind (including, of course, Susan), complaints to various organisations and much more besides.

The structure is slightly ad hoc, no

doubt to blend material from all fifty-plus years of the series, and to create interest for fans both new and old. Each letter is presented in one to three pages of material including a short synopsis of any relevant TV episodes and plenty of pictures. The overall effect is attractive and well thought out.

The letters themselves range from the amusing (the Third Doctor's application for a UNIT pass), to the indignant (his time at the academy) to the emotional (the aforementioned letter to Susan). The book as a whole contains over 100 letters across its 256 well-presented pages. The best letter? For us, it's the final one – no clues though, you'll have to read it yourself to find out!

Destined for many a fan's Christmas stocking, this is well worth a browse and deserves its place in any collection.

TONY JONES

★★★★★★★★★ 9

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LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X



Yes, she is holding a stake and wearing lip-gloss. Problem?

Everyone's view on feminism is different. For that reason, sometimes it can be hard to hold onto a feminist celebrity idol. When they're plastered everywhere from the Internet to tabloids and gossip magazines, their opinions don't have many places to hide, and one slip-up can brand them as sexist, angry, wrong. And when all of the female role models you previously supported start to shout and throw names at each other, no matter how important the subject matter is, it can be very confusing.

If you've been on the Internet at all recently, you'll have noticed all the headlines about Nicki Minaj, Taylor Swift, and Miley Cyrus getting real about gender inequality and the inherent racism within our society - including many feminist circles. All three of these women have previously made some great points in the name of equality. However, some of society's feminist icons have also said awful things. And when things get messy as they often do in the media, you find your support shifting from one person to another, and it's really quite tiring to be honest.

So, how about we look at some fictional role models?

I've made these kind of lists a million times - a lot because I take a weird satisfaction out of making lists, but mostly because I think it's important.

And I think that at a time like this, when some of the most powerful, most listened-to women in pop culture are being grilled and criticised, it's essential to take a bit of a step back and remind yourself of your own principles.

With that in mind, I've chosen a list of the female characters that shaped me, and helped me become the person I am today.

1) Nyota Uhura (*Star Trek: The Original Series*)

Now, when it comes to the most important and influential female characters ever, Uhura is probably up there in the Top Five. Nichelle Nichols character inspired boys and girls of all kinds to study science, to join NASA, and have the confidence to do what they dreamed of - even if society told them it was impossible. During the social inequality of the '60s, Uhura was - and remains - the ultimate symbol of hope.

2) Ginny Weasley (*Harry Potter*)

Hermione Granger is pretty amazing, and I adore her. But Ginny does not get nearly enough love in this world. Ginny is regularly accused of getting around too much (so what?), is used by Voldemort and survives, and still manages to be the best witch in the school. Oh, and she becomes the seeker for the Quidditch

team, the Holyhead Harpies. Ginny gets stuff done.

3) The Halliwell sisters (*Charmed*)

All of the *Charmed* sisters have been added to this list, because they are all my idols. Growing up, I wanted to be them. They taught me what to expect from realistic relationships, what kind of man to avoid, what kind of guy might stick around and be there for you. The Halliwells taught me the importance of loving the women in your life. Also, how cool magic is, and that girl power overcomes everything.

4) Buffy (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*)

As a little girl growing up, Buffy was immensely important to me. She proved to me that I could control my own fate, that I could kick ass, be smart, be a leader, and still be girly. She was realistic and entirely herself, despite having the weight of being the slayer on her shoulders. My mother made a point to sit my sister and I down in front of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and watch it as a family. Buffy's strength has absolutely shaped how I see my own potential today.

5) Martha Jones (*Doctor Who*)

It was hard to choose one *Doctor Who* companion, but in the end, I had to choose Martha. When she runs into people who make her life difficult because of her race and because she's a woman, she graciously and cleverly shows them that they're wrong. She saves The Doctor's life a million times, saves the world pretty much alone at least once, and she knows her worth. Martha Jones should be everyone's idol, if I'm honest.

6) Peggy Carter (*Agent Carter*)

A part of me wishes I'd been able to watch *Agent Carter* as a child, too, because Peggy is the perfect role model for minorities. As a female detective working in 1940s America, and well known for being Captain America's sort-of-girlfriend, she's naturally not taken seriously. But that doesn't stop her from standing up for herself, challenging the social norms, and using her colleagues' ignorance to solve a mystery single-

A PERSONAL TOP TEN FICTIONAL FEMINIST ROLE MODELS



From left to right: Garnet, Amethyst, Steven, and Pearl. A colourful, fun show that encourages children to be themselves and love themselves.

handedly. And all the while, she does it in the most amazing outfits in the world. Now, that's the kind of woman I want to be (or maybe marry?)

7) Korra (*Legend of Korra*)

Korra is one of many amazing women from the *Avatar* franchise. She's a bisexual woman of colour, who has the weight of the world leaning on her. Everyone's attention is constantly on her as she fights whatever bad guy is threatening the balance of the universe at the time. She's strong willed, fiery, and sometimes a little thoughtless - but she's also the bravest, most selfless person ever. She's a fascinating, realistic character, and (most of the time) a wonderful role model.

8) Usagi (*Sailor Moon*)

Too many movies and children's cartoons have the boys being daft and clumsy, and the girls being sensible and organised. It gives off the message that girls are expected to reach an adult's maturity at an insanely young age, and it's a really unhealthy way to bring up children. Usagi, however, defies that stereotype. She eats like a horse, she can be a complete idiot, and she's so lovable. Who doesn't love a magical girl who saves the world whilst stuffing her face with cake and steamed buns?

9) The Women from *Steven Universe*

Yes, I chose all of its female characters. *Steven Universe* is yet another revolutionary show in a stream of socially progressive cartoons, and all of the female characters in the show are believable, strong role models for boys and girls all over the world. It's a show that teaches people of all genders that they can be who they want to be, love who they want to love, and save the universe whilst they're at it. You don't have to be a kid to love this show, although I really wish it'd been on telly when I had been

little. I would have all the *Steven Universe* stationery, backpacks, T-shirts as if I don't now at the age of 21

10) Clarke (*The 100*)

Last but not least, I've chosen Clarke from *The 100*, an exciting sci-fi drama which shows the merits of a matriarchy without feeling the need to point it out all the time or offer any more of an explanation. Clarke proves that you must be strong and vulnerable, kind and severe to be a good leader, and that sometimes, girls do it best. She finds it hard to switch off, as anyone would in her situation, and that's probably why everyone under her watch is alive.

I wanted to add a lot more characters to this list. I wanted to talk about Evie O'Connell from *The Mummy*, who partially inspired me to become a classicist. I could have mentioned Sarah Jane Smith, feminist icon of sci-fi. Or Princess Leia, Padme, Captain Janeway, *Fringe*'s Olivia Dunham, Ripley, Seven of Nine, Paprika, the *Firefly* characters Inara, River, Zoë, Kaylee... honestly, the list goes on forever. It's first and foremost these women who made me the feminist, the person I am today.

So, when society hits times of struggle in terms of women's rights, I turn to the female characters who have inspired me, and millions of other people, to support the equality of women in the real world, as well as the fictional.



From left to right: Clarke and her love interest, Lexa

SPACE: 1999

By Paul Mount

Moonbase Alpha... Massive Nuclear Explosion... Moon Torn Out Of Earth Orbit... Hurlled Into Outer Space... As the second series of Gerry Anderson's explosive sci-fi drama *SPACE: 1999* finally arrives on Blu-ray, *STARBURST* hitches a ride on a passing *Eagle Transporter* and takes a look back at one of the most lavish and ambitious fantasy TV shows ever made...



Space: 1999 could so easily have been *UFO 2*. Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's ground-breaking 1969-70 adventure series – their first live action TV production following a string of Supermarionation successes throughout the 1960s – had come and gone virtually unnoticed on British television. But the series, which followed the exploits of the Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation protecting the Earth from the attentions of aliens visiting Earth and harvesting body-parts from human victims in a last-ditch bid to keep their dying species alive, became a sizable hit when it finally arrived on American shores in 1972. Lew Grade, at the time Managing Director of ITC (Incorporated Television Company), put Gerry and Sylvia on alert for a potential second series of *UFO* and pre-production began. It had not gone unnoticed that *UFO* episodes set on and around SHADO's Moonbase complex seemed to rate higher than the more Earthbound stories, so the series was retooled, the action shifted forward in time (the original series was set in 1980 which seemed significantly less futuristic in the mid-1970s) and relocated to Moonbase for a series tentatively

titled *UFO: 1999*. But even as Gerry and Sylvia toiled away at the show's new format, *UFO*'s American ratings started to falter and Lew Grade pulled the plug on the proposed second series. But Gerry Anderson, never one to waste a good idea, reworked the concept significantly and in due course *Space: 1999* rose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the aborted *UFO 2*. The series entered what was to become an extended fifteen-month production process in November 1973 for its first twenty-four episode series. A co-production between ITV and Rai television in Italy (accounting for the preponderance of Italian actors in supporting roles in several episodes) and budgeted at nearly \$300,000 per episode, the first series was to become the most expensive TV series of its type in history at the time. Despite Sylvia Anderson's protestations that the two leads should be played by British actors, then-husband-and-wife team Martin Landau and Barbara Bain (still high profile thanks to their recurring roles in the *Mission: Impossible* TV series) were cast to improve the series' chances of securing the attention of the American TV Networks.



It's September 13th, 1999 and John Koenig, the new Commander of the sprawling, multi-national lunar complex Moonbase Alpha, arrives to take up his new commission. But a catastrophic accident at a nuclear waste dumping facility on the far side of the Moon causes an enormous explosion. The Moon is ripped out of Earth's orbit and flung out into the void of space. The crew of Moonbase Alpha – some 311 souls – are adrift in the Universe, their only hope of survival laying in their search for a new home out amongst the stars.

Although superficially a straightforward science fiction adventure – albeit one powered by a core concept derided as ridiculous by even the least scientifically inclined in the audience – *Space: 1999*'s first season attracted much attention not only for its action/adventure elements and its typical Anderson hardware (especially the iconic Eagle Transporter vessels which ferried the Alphans to their extraterrestrial destinations), but for its occasional metaphysical and philosophical story elements. *Black Sun* saw the Moon pulled through a space wormhole which transported them to another part of the Universe (with Alpha's senior scientist Victor Bergman suggesting some 'greater power' might be guiding their journey) and in *Collision Course*, the Moon's imminent destruction is said to be a preordained event which will allow the Alphans to evolve to a higher plane of existence. Otherwise, the series provided a run of exciting, colourful, and lavish space adventures such as memorable ice world episode *Death's Other Dominion*, *The Full Circle* (where Alphans regress to cavemen on an alien planet) and *The Last Enemy*, in which Moonbase Alpha becomes involved in interplanetary conflict.

But despite huge production values and a glittering cast including ratings-grabbing international guest stars such as Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Joan Collins, and Brian Blessed, American networks were resistant to the show's outer space charms, unwilling to take a chance on an untried show presented to them without any of their own creative input. ITC took the unusual step of selling the show directly into syndication and, in time, *Space:*

1999's first year (screening in 1975) was available to around 96% of the American population. In the UK, the show was less fortunate; showing in different timeslots across the ITV regions – some areas aired it against the timeless *Doctor Who* on BBC One – the show failed to find a significant audience and was quickly shunted around the schedules or else used as afternoon/early evening filler material.

However, the show had done well enough in the USA for Lew Grade to sanction a second series. But history seemed to be repeating itself when ratings began to tumble towards the end of the run and the second series was cancelled just before it could enter significant pre-production (some scripts having already been written). By now, Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's tempestuous relationship had collapsed and with the couple now separated, American producer Fred Freiberger had been brought in to effectively 'showrun' the proposed second series. Gerry and Freiberger – who had previously worked on the troubled third

and final season of the original *Star Trek* – sprang into action and retooled the show's format, introducing a new shape-shifting alien character into the cast and persuading ITC that they would be able to reignite interest in the series with the all-important American audience.

But more significant and far-reaching changes were also being made. Many of the first year's well-liked supporting characters – including Barry Morse's Bergman – were written out with no explanation, while the show's impressive, two-layered Main Mission Control Room was replaced by a more cramped and less visually interesting underground Command Centre. Anderson regular Barry Gray's strident theme tune was replaced by a frantic, generic contribution from Derek Wadsworth. Catherine Schell was drafted in as the alien Maya from the planet Psychon and Tony Anholt appeared as previously unmentioned Alphan Security Chief Tony Verdeschi.

The characters became less dour and





humourless in Series Two – John Koenig was even seen to smile occasionally – relationships became warmer and the stories lost any pretension towards serious, thought-provoking science fiction and often became routine monster-of-the-week romps or else just colourful, outlandish space opera. Subtlety was out, rubber lizard-monsters and alien blobs were in. The second series consisted mainly of yarns such as *The Bringers of Wonder*, *Space Warp* and *The Rules of Luton* (its title famously inspired by a road sign spotted by Freiberger on his morning drive to the show's Pinewood production base), which focused more on the horrors of alien life than the continuing plight and deprivations of the Alphans.

Fans and casual viewers alike were not impressed by the changes to the series. It began airing in 1976; many ITV regions in the UK screened the series intermittently between September 1976 and September 1977 or else not at all, and although popular in some territories, it failed to win back the support it had lost in its first year in the United States and plans for a third – a tighter run of just thirteen episodes – were dropped, as were tentative plans for a spin-off show starring Schell's shape-shifter Maya.

Space: 1999 was an admirable, if slightly ramshackle, attempt to create a British *Star Trek*. Despite its sometimes plodding pace and portentous storylines, the first series is where it really shines. Fans point the finger of blame at Freiberger for 'dumbing down' the second series, but in reality many of the changes to the show's format were made purely to keep it alive. The first year's run remains gloriously ambitious – the costume and production design are outstanding and Brian Johnson's model work is still faultless – and even the second, with its menagerie of monsters and simplistic, faster paced storylines, has its moments and is rarely less than watchable. The show has lived on in original fiction and



comic strips and the story even came to an end in a seven-minute fan-produced mini-episode *Message From Moonbase Alpha* in 1999 (fittingly), written by the series' script editor Johnny Byrne and featuring original cast member Zienia Merton (Moonbase operative Sandra Benes) relaying a final message from Alpha on behalf of the rest of the crew who are embarking on an exodus to a suitable new home planet. The men and women of Moonbase Alpha found peace at last on a planet they named Terra Alpha and *Space: 1999* finally had the ending it was so cruelly denied by the vagaries of 1970s TV audiences and Network Executives. ✦

Both series of *SPACE: 1999* are now available on Blu-ray from Network Distributing.



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HYDE

IN PLAIN SIGHT

BY PAUL MOUNT

STARBURST VISITS THE LONDON SET OF ITV'S AMBITIOUS NEW FANTASY SERIES JEKYLL AND HYDE, WHICH NOT ONLY PUTS A SUPERHERO SPIN ON A CLASSIC CREATION FROM VICTORIAN LITERATURE, BUT ALSO LOOKS SET TO BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO EARLY EVENING TV IN THE UK...

Jekyll and Hyde is in many ways the start of that whole idea of the superhero/alter ego thing, someone who can turn into someone else and do all the things that he wished he could do but can't do in his normal form, says Charlie Higson, executive producer/showrunner of ITV's new family fantasy drama **Jekyll and Hyde**. We're chatting in the shadow of the huge neon sign that dominates one of the show's imposing purpose-built sets – the Empire nightclub where much of the action takes place – in Three Mills Studios in London's East End, which has been the show's home since February. Higson, formerly one of the ensemble cast of 1990s sketch show *The Fast Show* (although readers of a certain vintage might remember him as the slimline lead singer with The Higsons, an early 1980s funk/punk dance collective), but nowadays

better known as the author of a string of popular Young Adult book series such as *The Enemy* and *Young James Bond*, is explaining the literary history and enduring influence of Robert Louis Stevenson's original Jekyll and Hyde story. *The Incredible Hulk* is very much nicked from *Jekyll and Hyde*, and the Beast in the X-Men specifically says 'I'm like a Jekyll and Hyde figure'. Stevenson's story was very modern, the birth of a new type of horror, moving away from that crusty old style where it was all set in old castles in Europe, as it was set in contemporary London and was about the monster within. It's a psychological tale and it was the birth of so many things which are still current now and that whole idea of the alter ego, the secret personality, feeds into all that superhero stuff but also into shows like *Breaking Bad* and *Homeland*.



In the wake of the success of the reinvented **Doctor Who** in 2005, ITV, not unreasonably, decided it wanted its own family-friendly weekend fantasy romp. Monster-hunting series **Primeval** was reasonably successful for a couple of years, but the disastrous failure of 2009's **Demons** sent ITV hurrying back to the safer (and cheaper) ground of its more familiar talent/variety show formats. But times and tastes change and **Jekyll and Hyde** was born as a result of ITV deciding to take the plunge back into full-blooded action adventure. *It came about by accident,* explains Higson.

*I pitched it by mistake! ITV were trying to develop something for this slot and it was being driven a lot by their foreign sales team who wanted a big ten-hour, big budget series of this nature that they could sell. ITV want their own branded, in-house ITV family drama equivalent to **Doctor Who**. They knew my **Young James Bond** and **The Enemy** series, so they called me in and I said 'I'm way too busy at the moment to do anything and I haven't been thinking about this type of slot or this type of idea, so I don't have anything at the moment but let me know the sort of thing you're after so if I do have any ideas in the future I could come back. They said they wanted something, with elements of fantasy and horror and action and adventure, which needed to be an existing known title of some sort so it's easy to sell, something quintessentially English but something with a twist and done in a way people wouldn't expect, maybe a period drama, with bits of horror which might appeal to kids and grown-ups. I just said in passing 'so maybe something like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?' and they said 'Brilliant, can you write us a treatment?' I said 'I'm not pitching the bloody thing, I'm just trying to work out what you want' and they said 'Well, that's exactly what we want, that's perfect. So I went away and thought about it and wrote a treatment. The original book is very short, you can read it in one sitting and it's nothing like you expect it to be, it sort of finishes where most films would have the climax of act one. I felt it was such an interesting central idea but I needed to open it out to convince them*



[ITV] that you could have a whole world and lots of stories and adventures which keep generating ideas.

The first consideration was where and when this new interpretation of Jekyll and Hyde would be set. There were three options, Charlie explains. We could do the traditional Victorian Gothic piece, maybe with a steampunk approach to it, a bit like Guy Ritchie did with **Sherlock Holmes**, or we could set it in the contemporary world, which would have been the cheapest option. But I don't really like the modern world, I wasn't sure what fun you could have with it and the whole idea of trying to keep a secret identity in the modern world seemed impossible we're all on 24-hour surveillance, it'd be all over YouTube. The other alternative was to do it somewhere unexpected, in another era and I do like the 1930s, it's where my Young





Bond books are set so I've done a lot of research on it. It lends itself to a lot of great stories and ideas, there was so much going on at the time and you can put in echoes of Indiana Jones, Tintin, the Universal horror films - plus you had those lovely kind of glossy wisecracking things like *The Thin Man*. So it felt like there was a lot we could feed into that and it was something we hadn't really seen before and a superhero/horror/Jekyll and Hyde thing in the '30s felt like quite a nice idea.



Robert Jekyll, 2015-style, is a newly-qualified doctor, the grandson of Stevenson's original tortured scientist. Living in 1930s Ceylon with his foster parents in blissful ignorance of his monstrous heritage, Robert is called back to the UK to settle outstanding matters relating to a family estate he has no idea even exists. He quickly becomes involved in the dark and shadowy world of strange creatures and Machiavellian agencies with agendas of their own. The whole series is cleverly structured to continually mirror the duality of Jekyll and Hyde. I've taken this idea of Jekyll and Hyde and put it in everywhere, says Charlie. There's a good girl and a bad girl, there's a good organisation and there's a bad organisation. There's an organisation of monsters called Tenebrae and there's a secretive government organisation called MIO - also known as 'The Invisible Men' - which is run by the fabulous Richard E. Grant as Sir Robert Bulstrode, who work behind the scenes; their job to remove any monsters and anything supernatural from the public domain so that people know nothing of what's going on. In the first episode, there's this new young guy who's joining the organisation and he's saying 'Are you pulling my leg, there aren't any monsters?' and Bulstrode says 'That's because we're so good at our job'. These two organisations are competing for Jekyll's soul. If he goes to his Hyde side he will lean towards the Tenebrae organisation, if he goes to his Jekyll side he will lean the other

way. But he doesn't trust either of them so that generates a lot of stories and plots and we're halfway between doing 'monster of the week' standalone episodes and a longer, wider story arc because that's what people seem to like in TV these days, that sort of box set culture of getting involved with a story but in trying to make each episode satisfying in itself with a different threat each week.

STARBURST wasn't fortunate enough to witness any actual filming during our visit, but our tour of the show's sets demonstrates the care and attention which has gone into what's clearly a prodigious, big budget production. They are designed by Oscar-winner Catrin Meredydd and dressed with astonishing and intricate attention to detail by Charlotte Watts - see Jekyll's ornate drawing room, his steep, stone-walled laboratory and Bulstrode's foreboding office. The show's co-executive producer Foz Allen (whose own credits include acclaimed BBC children's drama *Wolfblood*) is hugely optimistic about the show's potential. I genuinely think there's nothing like it on television, he tells us. Tonally, it looks very stylish and it is, if we get the mix right, Indiana Jones versus the 1930s horror movies and in the middle is a thematic journey which we all have in our lives in different ways which is 'How do I live my life? Which part of me is more important?' - in this case the dark, hedonistic side or the socially responsible, civilised side.

Foz is effusive in his praise for the work



Charlie Higson has put into developing his take on one of the genre classics. *It's an honour to work with a creative brain which is so clever and has so much depth,* he says. *You find yourself going 'What's that about?' and he says 'Well, in series four...'* That's fantastic, but it's genuinely taxing because you're thinking 'But how does it make any sense now? and how are people going to know about it without footnotes? Hopes are high that the show will have a decent run on ITV. In pitching it to ITV and setting the whole thing up for them trying to sell it abroad, nobody wants to buy a one-off series, everyone wants ongoing series; that's what ITV want, obviously,' says Charlie Higson. *It will depend on how much they sell it, how much people watch it. But the idea would be to do ten episodes a year. I had to do rough storylines for Series Two and three to prove to them that there were legs in it.*

The show certainly won't fail due to a lack of front-of-house talent in the cast. As well as Grant's sinister Bulstrode, regulars include Stephanie Hyem as Jekyll's love interest Lily Clarke, Natalia Gumede as nightclub owner/crime boss (and Hyde's secret squeeze) Bella, Donald Sumpter as Garson, and there'll be guest appearances from the likes of Sinéad Cusack and Amelia Bullmore. Jekyll/Hyde himself/themselves are played by dashing 26-year-old actor Tom Bateman, fresh from a stint as Giuliano Medici in the recently axed Starz drama **Da Vinci's Demons**. Speaking to us during

a brief and breathless break from filming, Tom, dressed in stylish 1930s greatcoat and lounge suit, is clearly enjoying his outlandish and demanding new role.

It's absolutely brilliant, great fun, he enthuses. *To my shame, I'd never read Stevenson's book until I was auditioning and then I read it and loved it and I think what Charlie has done with it is amazing, setting it in this time period with this backdrop. The story's amazing because it's not just action adventure although there's a lot of that but it's the psychology of what it's like to lead this double life that you can't control and all these other monsters and dealing with them as well and the good and evil in them all.*

The opportunity to explore two sides of the same character is clearly a gift for the enthusiastic young actor. *I wanted to emphasise the difference between them,* he says. *Robert is the closest to my age - he's 25/26 - so I could really react in the moment to whatever the director threw at me. But for Hyde, you need to bring something different to the table and I'd looked for inspiration in certain places - I quite liked Heath Ledger's Joker; it's the mischief, his power, not just being evil for evil's sake but he actually enjoys having power over people. Hyde has actually become quite easy to play because it's such fun; I get to go a bit mad and I tell the director 'I'm going to go a bit crazy and you tell me when to reign it in' whereas Robert's a lot more intellectual in the way he thinks things through.*

Finding the right actor for the role was a challenge in itself. *It was very difficult because we produce a lot of Jekyll actors - nice, polite, repressed, diffident Hugh Grant posh Public School types - but we have very few Oliver Reeds,* explains Charlie Higson. *We had a few more in the sixties with the likes of Sean Connery and Michael Caine and Stanley Baker but lately we've had hardly any. So trying to find someone who was genuinely physical and scary and dominant and sexy all at the same time was very hard, but fortunately, Tom is absolutely fantastic. Because the whole thing rests on him; if you don't believe that central conceit, nothing else works. But you always know*

when he's Jekyll or Hyde and everything else stems from that.

As for that all-important physical transformation, the look which makes Hyde demonstrably a different creature to the more civilised Jekyll, the new show is keen to go down a more subdued route than some previous incarnations. *There is some subtle stuff that we do to him,* explains Charlie.

He has slightly more prominent veins and things but there's a definite feeling that he's become someone different and Tom is a very physical actor, he's tall and dominant. He goes through a more traditional monstrous transformation sequence but at the end of it he ends up more or less where he started but you realise he has this potential within him, so it's like this beast is awakening but he controls it and sucks it all in and there he is as Hyde and you know what he's capable of. At other points in the series when things are pushed to extremes, we'll see a bit more of that side of it.

With its combination of exotic overseas location filming in Sri Lanka, domestic filming in and around London and in atmospheric locations such as Chatham which can still pass for 1930s England as well as a menagerie of extraordinary CGI/prosthetic creatures such as the malevolent Mr Wax, the half-dog/half-human Harbinger, a soul-sucking Siren, a seven-foot-four giant with a lobster claw for a hand, and an assortment of vampires, werewolves, and zombies, **Jekyll and Hyde** is clearly going all out to make a huge impact on that sometimes hard-to-please TV audience. *What's been great is that people right across the board have responded very well to the scripts and they've said they've loved this world we've created and they're all working really hard to make it come true,* says Charlie. *We've got two soundstages full of these amazing sets with hundreds of people beavering away. ITV have been really behind it, we've got a good budget for it and it has been really exciting to do. It's a big, bold, exciting, fantasy action adventure series of the type that we don't make enough of here.*

JEKYLL AND HYDE arrives on ITV on Sunday, October 25th at 6.30pm.



ROOT OF ALL EVIL

by Joel Harley

After much rumour and longing from devotees over the past few decades, we are about to meet up with an old friend as he continues his fight against the Deadites in the TV series *ASH VS. EVIL DEAD*...



ROB TAPERT, BRUCE CAMPBELL AND SAM RAIMI

Pity poor Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell. Not since 1992's *Army of Darkness* have either been able to move for over-eager journalists and frenzied fans demanding to know when *The Evil Dead 4* is coming. No matter how many series of *Burn Notice* Groovy Bruce makes or *Spider-Man* movies and *Wizard of Oz* prequels Sam Raimi directs, all anyone wants to know about is *The Evil Dead 4*. Not even the *Evil-Dead*-in-disguise (bloody brilliant, though it is) *Drag Me to Hell* or *Evil Dead* remake could put that one to rest. Although, to be fair, Campbell's cameo in the latter cheekily suggested that there was hope yet for The Chosen One to rise again.

One day, they both promised, with a wink, *maybe*. Well here it is, at last. Not quite *The Evil Dead 4*, but maybe even better. In our age of TV horror, Bruce Campbell's Ashley Williams is set



to make his official return, chainsaw, boomstick and all. With *Hannibal*, *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* taking the small screen by gory storm, television feels like the most natural place in the world for *The Evil Dead*. Even then, you'd be forgiven for expecting a TV series to pick up from where the recent remake left off, or start somewhere anew (fresh kids in the same cabin maybe) or... even worse, take its cues from the awful *From Dusk Till Dawn*, padding the story out with telly level actors and acting. We've read the news, we've seen the poster and we've watched the trailer but it's still so hard to believe that we're getting a Bruce Campbell-led *Evil Dead* TV show.

Ash vs. Evil Dead will consist of ten episodes, running at 30 minutes each. Too short? Undoubtedly, but we should be grateful that we're getting it at all plenty of coming seasons (hopefully) to work on a lengthier deal. The series is being produced by US channel Starz and premieres this Halloween. Sadly, no UK broadcaster or date has been announced as of yet. Fingers crossed for Netflix as the short episode lengths may hurt a lot less when binged. Executive produced by Raimi, Campbell and Rob Tapert, it's in the best of hands. Even better, Raimi will be directing the first episode, in addition to writing the rest with his brother Ivan and Campbell. The whole gang's back, then. All we need is a cameo from Ted Raimi to complete the set.

Described as a horror sitcom, it'll veer closer to the tone of *Army of Darkness* and *Evil Dead 2* than the first movie especially if the gag-heavy trailer is anything to go by. Campbell is returning as Ash, but he does so accompanied by a pair of sidekicks Ray Santiago as Pablo Simon Bolivar, and Jill Marie Jones as State Trooper Amanda Fisher. While the first half of *Evil Dead 2* proved that we could quite happily sit and watch Bruce by himself in a cabin for the best part of an hour, this

will at least give him someone to run his trademark mouth off at, and presumably take some of the physical abuse that the 57-year-old is getting too old to handle himself. That's not all though Lucy Lawless is also set to appear, playing the enigmatic Ruby, a mysterious figure on her own quest to stop the Necronomicon outbreak Ash finds himself at the centre of. That'll give good cheer to *Xena: Warrior Princess* fans, then a reunion for Xena and Autolycus. Again, get Ted Raimi in there and we can have a little Joxer action too. However, let's not cause further headaches by bringing up the *Army of Darkness* vs. *Xena* comic book crossover from a few years back.

The plot sees Ash emerge from retirement (Deadite killing retirement, that is he still appears to be an S-Mart employee) to battle a new Necronomicon-based threat as it unexpectedly arises years after his last battle. We find Ash living in a trailer (like the man himself in *My Name is Bruce*) and wearing a girdle. Deadites attack, Ash and his new friend(s) fend them off; and so *Ash vs. Evil Dead* is born. With its emphasis on comedy, plenty of gore on display (see poor Pablo's broken bottle) and reverence to the past, it's not hard to see why fans of the franchise might be salivating. Indeed, there's the blue shirt and brown slacks, and the most recent poster sees Ash standing on the hood of (or beside of, depending on whether you're viewing in portrait or landscape) the beloved Oldsmobile. We're so resisting the urge to use the word groovy right now.

Where the series will take us beyond that is unclear. Will we find out which ending of *Army of Darkness* reigned true for Ash (one guesses the less favoured version, in which he manages to get his way back to modernity)? Will there be a return to the cabin in Ash's future (undoubtedly)? And will Sam Raimi ever make *The Evil Dead 4*? Goddammit! You were told to stop asking that!





What is for certain, however, is that *Ash vs. Evil Dead* is going to be unlike anything else on television. Less morose than *The Walking Dead*, less soap-operaesque than *Bates Motel*, not as good as *Hannibal* (no offence – nothing is as good as *Hannibal*), better than *Hemlock Grove* (everything is better than... ah, you get the idea) and more colourful than just about everything else out there (*American Horror Story*'s ironic camp doesn't count), it's effectively its own genre in horror sitcom. Sorry *Holliston*, not enough people are aware of your existence. As a sequel to a franchise that hasn't budged since 1992 (not

counting the remake), it's so niche that it might give us cause for worry – but Campbell's charisma should hopefully keep newcomers as addicted as the old. He's a shotgun-armed, chainsaw-fisted lothario with a smart mouth and a chin to die for. What's not to love? If audiences fell in love with his Sam Axe, well, wait until they get a load of this guy.

Sure, there's room for it to go horribly wrong – hilarious as that trailer is, there's a risk Raimi and Campbell could go overboard with the wisecracking and just wind up with Bruce Campbell playing Bruce Campbell. Don't forget the cowardice, surprising (but very occasional) competence and (even more occasional) derring-do – Ash is more than just a snarky mouth. Fingers crossed for a bit of humanity, too. Sounds like we're on the right track though. As Campbell said during an interview: *Ash has survivor guilt. You could have a heyday with his PTSD. He's a war vet. He continues being a trash-talking know-it-all who doesn't really know anything. He's the ultimate anti-hero. He is kind of an idiot, but man, if I had to go to battle, I'd want to be next to that guy, because he'll bring it if he has to.* Bring it indeed. Whenever we get it in the UK, it cannot come fast enough.

That, at least, should put a stop to people mithering Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell with the question: when are you gonna make *The Evil Dead 4*? Actually no... not quite. Just as *Community* has its six seasons and a movie mantra, so there's the hope that this could propel Ash once more into sequelism, setting The Chin up for his fourth instalment of *The Evil Dead* proper. There's also the

intriguing prospect that this could tie-in with Fede Alvarez's 2013 *Evil Dead* remake and eventually see Ash team up with Jane Levy's Mia. Sounds unlikely, but stranger things have happened: this television series, for example. Whenever, however, if ever a sequel turns up, *Ash vs. Evil Dead* is certainly no alternative to be sniffed at. The TV horror-sphere had better watch out: there's a new King in town, baby.

So, Sam, Bruce... when are you going to make *The Evil Dead 4*, though?

ASH VS. EVIL DEAD begins on US TV on October 31st.





Best Movie / TV Podcast

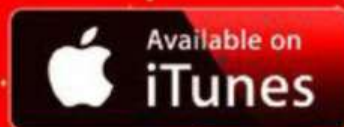


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By Ed Fortune

The trend and love for undead films shows no sign of dying out, and the comedic options seem to be running out as the latest hapless group to fend off the rotting corpses are more used to helping old ladies across the road. What do we make of **SCOUTS GUIDE TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE**?

Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse is one of those movie titles that seems to prove that movie makers will put zombies into literally anything. It's an intriguing premise; who else is going to survive the shambling hordes of roaming corpses if it's not the scouts? Aren't they always prepared?

This horror comedy has a pretty simple premise. High school losers Ben, Carter, and Augie are heading to their last scout camp. They may as well; they never get invited to the cool parties and all the girls think they're sort of dorky. These boys may be a whiz with a woggle and can certainly start a fire, but in the pecking order of high school, they're pretty much on the lowest shelf.

Luckily for their social standing, all of that changes when the

zombie apocalypse hits their home town. The boys team up with a shotgun-wielding cocktail waitress to fight the oncoming horde, using their know-how to come up with outlandish weapons. We are sure that their skills with knots and fire will be enough to keep them alive. The movie promises to be of the sort that is stuffed with very daft jokes; so far we've seen zombie cats and undead strippers. Expect gags about virginity, boobs, bottoms, and fart gags, rather than a searing examination into how mankind would cope if the dead did indeed rise.

Responsible for all this silliness is director Christopher Beau Landon, best known as the writer of 2007 film *Disturbia* and the last three *Paranormal Activity* movies, as well as the director behind both *Burning Palms* and *Paranormal Activity: The*





"Landon's work to this point has either been scary or comedic, so he seems the obvious choice to helm this low budget blood-and-boobs comedy feature."

Marked Ones. Landon's work to this point has either been scary or comedic, so he seems the obvious choice to helm this low budget blood-and-boobs comedy feature.

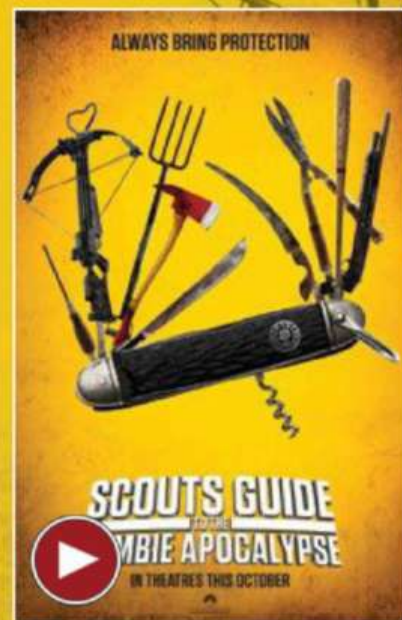
Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse has a broad and interesting cast. 18-year-old Tye Sheridan is on board as Ben; his previous movies include *The Stanford Prison Experiment* and *Dark Places*, both horror rather than comedy. His slightly older co-star Logan Miller has a similar background in spooky movies. Fresh-faced Joey Morgan rounds off the trio as Augie, that fat kid. He's a newcomer, but it does seem that his main role is to be the over-sized comic foil for the other two.

The movie also stars Patrick Schwarzenegger; son of Arnold and probably a future American president. You will be unsurprised to learn that he yet again plays a jock jerk in a comedy role. Patrick has previously been in movies such as *Benchwarmers* and *Grown Ups 2*, also as sporty bullies

who are usually the straight men to the shenanigans of the main cast. We predict he's going to get horribly killed in the movie. We will also get to see *Anchorman* star David Koechner as a scout leader, but not for long, as, unfortunately, he's soon set on fire and becomes undead. Still, we're sure he'll get some funny lines in early on - it would be a waste not to.

Playing against type is actress Sarah Dumont; another relative unknown, Sarah is better known for her modelling and her previous acting roles have seen her cast as generic pretty woman. In *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse*, they've given her a shotgun and told her to kick ass. Though we're sure she's going to be a comic foil for the Boy Scouts' inadequate groping and sexual frustration, we are sort of hoping she steals the show.

Oddly enough, the Boy Scouts of America (who are part of the worldwide Scout Movement) aren't particularly strangers to the idea of a zombie





apocalypse. The organisation's core values are listed as citizenship, compassion, cooperation, courage, faith, health and fitness, honesty, perseverance, positive attitude, resourcefulness, respect and responsibility. All useful stuff to have if you're dealing with the end of the world. Themed activity events are not uncommon in the scouts, and though *Zombie Jamborees* are uncommon, they do exist. As you might imagine, it's more an excuse to teach basic survival training skills and put up monster-themed archery targets than anything you may expect from an *Evil Dead* movie. At the 2013 Boy Scouts of America's National Jamboree, the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute even set up a zombie-themed educational game in which the scouts tagged each other using smart phones. Though it was an exercise in demonstrating how quickly infection can spread, the boys got into the spirit of the thing, utilising code names such as *Black.Plague* and *blame.the.zombie*.

Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse is looking like it will have a limited release in theatres before swiftly going to some sort of video on demand service. We're not sure if you have to see it at the cinema in order to qualify for a merit badge, but we're looking forward to giving it a go.

Check out the *SCOUTS GUIDE TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE* at cinemas from November 6th.

SCOUTS GUIDE TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE may well be the first time we've seen the neckerchief-wearing boys take on the hungry dead, but the zombie genre is no stranger to a variety of odd foes.

PLANTS VERSUS ZOMBIES

What began as a harmless tower defence game has now become a franchise in its own right. The game pitches a variety of adorable looking plants against a horde of hilarious undead. Pea plants shoot killer peas, Wall-nuts function as a wall against the monsters and so on. The zombies themselves are appropriately silly and cartoonish as well. The game is a cultural phenomenon and has been parodied on comedy TV shows, turned into a board game and even spawned another game, a third-person shooter called *Garden Warfare*.

ZOMBIES VERSUS UNICORNS

This Young Adult novel is an anthology featuring some of the great and the good of the YA stable, including Holly Black, Cassandra Clare and Garth Nix. Pitching the purest of mythological beasts against a people who have forgotten to lie down dying is an unusual idea, but being a collection of stories, it doesn't quite end in a pitch battle between the two factions. Instead, we get tales that show us the lighter side of the zombie condition and the darker aspects of everybody's favourite horned horses.

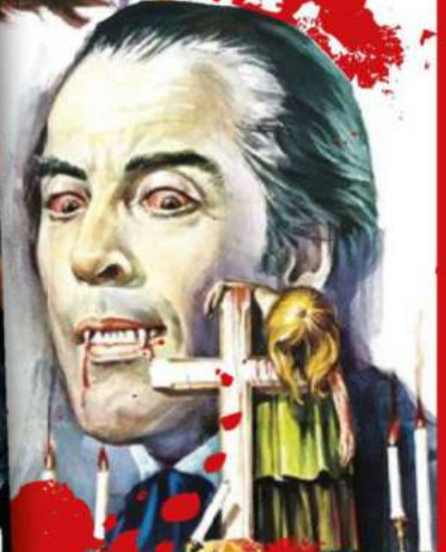
COCKNEYS VERSUS ZOMBIES

Described by some as *Lock, Stock and many rotting corpses*, this 2012 horror comedy put London's most colourful of locals against mindless and glassy-eyed drones. Notable for being Richard Briers' last film role as well as being rather funny in a very British sort of way. The cockneys, of course, fared quite well against the monsters, despite the city's overcrowding. For another example of Londoners coping with zombies, see *Shaun of the Dead*. Or failing that, any tube service at rush hour.

ZOMBIES VERSUS ROBOTS

IDW's tale of Terminator-style mechanical killing machines pitted against the rotters is very entertaining indeed. Marvel comics hit upon a similar idea with their recent *Secret Wars* series, throwing Ultron-style death machines against a variety of zombified super heroes. The only people who lose in these scenarios are the humans. The clear winner is almost always whoever is reading the book.

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STARBURST celebrates the iconic film series from the twisted mind of author CLIVE BARKER. Unlock the Lemarchand Box and enter the world of HELLRAISER.

Few icons have sent such a collective shiver through the annals of horror. Although Pinhead rubs shoulders with Freddie, Jason, Michael Myers and more, he was an altogether different beast. A cosmic surgeon from the furthest reaches of experience. An angel to some, a demon to others. Stop us if you've heard this one before.

Before Clive Barker turned his hand to directing, he explored the darkest imaginings of his innermost recesses. A talented writer and performer, Barker formed his own theatre company at college – The Dog Company. It was here that Barker met many of the key players who would help bring the Cenobites to the silver screen, including Doug Bradley himself. And it was working with George Pavlou in the early eighties on shockers inspired by his *Books of Blood* tales, where Barker was first exposed to the alchemic process of filmmaking. Haunted by the memory of a man falling to his death at an air show, and nurtured on Edgar Allan Poe, Barker was steeped in darkness from an early age. The idea for *Hellraiser* was the demented afterbirth of these experiences.

The principal ideas for *Hellraiser* were first explored in Barker's 1986 novella *The Hellbound Heart*. Written with a dreamy and evocative style, the text was deliberately cryptic about the Cenobites themselves; the character that would go on to become Pinhead was dubbed 'the engineer'. It made good on his reputation and mission statement as outlined in his popular *Books of Blood*, and represented a further foray into the viscerally unknown. The story goes that Frank, a self-centred, devil-may-care bloke, stumbles through life in a search for new hedonistic heights. His travels have granted him myriad sexual experiences and forbidden practices, the likes of which only lead to nihilism. After catching wind of an object known as the Lament Configuration, Frank tracks down the owner. Upon opening the box, surrounded by sacrificial and tokenistic offerings, he meets the

Cenobites; a group whose fixation on sadomasochism has led to a plateau where there is no difference between pain and pleasure. There is just experience and sensation. The

WE HAVE
SUCH
SIGHTS
TO SHOW YOU...

BY DOMINIC CUTHBERT



subsequent film followed the text fairly faithfully, both fundamentally a play on the classic haunted house formula. But there was one major detour, which caused upset with some readers. Kirsty, the heroine of the novella (and Ashley Laurence's debut role), is a friend of Frank's estranged brother Rory, and nurses a secret love for him. In the film, however, she's his daughter, which creates a kind of Freudian dissonance between the two texts.

1987's *Hellraiser* saw Barker sitting solo in the director's chair for the first time. After his previous outings failed to garner much attention, it was an intrepid move. If fate has any bearing on existence, *Hellraiser* might be living proof. The stars seemed in alignment, with what seemed like incidental choices or changes at the time of production having a profound effect on the genre. Doug Bradley was always the original choice to take on the mantle of the lead Cenobite, but he was offered another part in the form of one of the mattress movers seen at the beginning of the film. As a plucky young

actor, Bradley thought it was important that punters be able to see his face so early on in his career. Despite almost turning the role of Pinhead down, he came to his senses. Though Barker was never happy with the moniker Pinhead, preferring instead Priest—or Hell Priest as revealed in *The Scarlet Gospels*—the nickname stuck and was made canonical for later entries in the series.

The hands-on approach to filming forced the players to reconsider traditional techniques. By shooting on location in a real house, Barker was required to come at cinematography from a completely different angle. This notion was also carried across into the icky effects. Yes, that really is a sandwich bag being used as a beating heart. With the jerky weirdness of the stop motion scenes, and the KY Jelly glistening of Frank's ephemeral skinlessness, it is still a slick yet sordid affair. But its major flaw is the dubbing. It was shot in London, but studio New World, with dollar signs in their eyes, claimed the film would be that much

more marketable if the location was jerry-rigged to the US. Ipso facto, American actors were called in to dub over the Brits. You can't help but wince at the finished effect. But nonetheless, the film, made on a \$1 million budget, has since become one of the single most important horror movies of all time.

The second in the series, *Hellbound*, was a direct continuation of the first, as if the original material had been cut in two. Suffering from second movie syndrome, the film forever lives in the lengthening shadow of its predecessor. This time around, Barker stepped back into a producer role, with Tony Randel filling in as director. Although it represented the breakthrough moment for Randel's career, it was something of a death knell for the franchise. Still, it gave fans an opportunity to bear witness to the origins of the puzzle box, to visit the labyrinth of hell, and, most excitingly, find out just who the fuck Pinhead was. Elliot Spencer was a British Army Captain in WWI, who somehow happened across the puzzle box. His subsequent sensory exploitation, and implementation of hooks, chains and slicers,





gave rise to Pinhead. Ever the champion of monsters, Barker gave the Cenobites a fine send off by reverting them back to their human states in death. But Pinhead was already a cultural phenomenon, and refused to stay deceased.

As the franchise waned, Pinhead increasingly became a two-bit Freddy Krueger, cracking wise and spinning puns. This was evident even from the third entry, which saw the two fundamental parts of Pinhead split into two distinct entities: the human and the other. This was at a time when even Freddie's jibes were wearing thin, and what had made Pinhead an icon had all but fled. Bradley's charisma and booming voice were enough to keep the franchise ticking over, but in its death throes, even he was a relic of the past.

Hell on Earth was very much a product of its time. Released in 1992 and directed by B-movie merchant Anthony Hickox, it charted too-cool-for-school rich kid J. P. Monroe looking for more morbid knick-knacks for his nightclub. With his flair for Gothic chic,

he can't help but pick up the Pillar of Souls. Inside is contained the monstrous essence of Pinhead, and he's searching for a way out. But for all its gore and effects, it was a very ordinary affair.

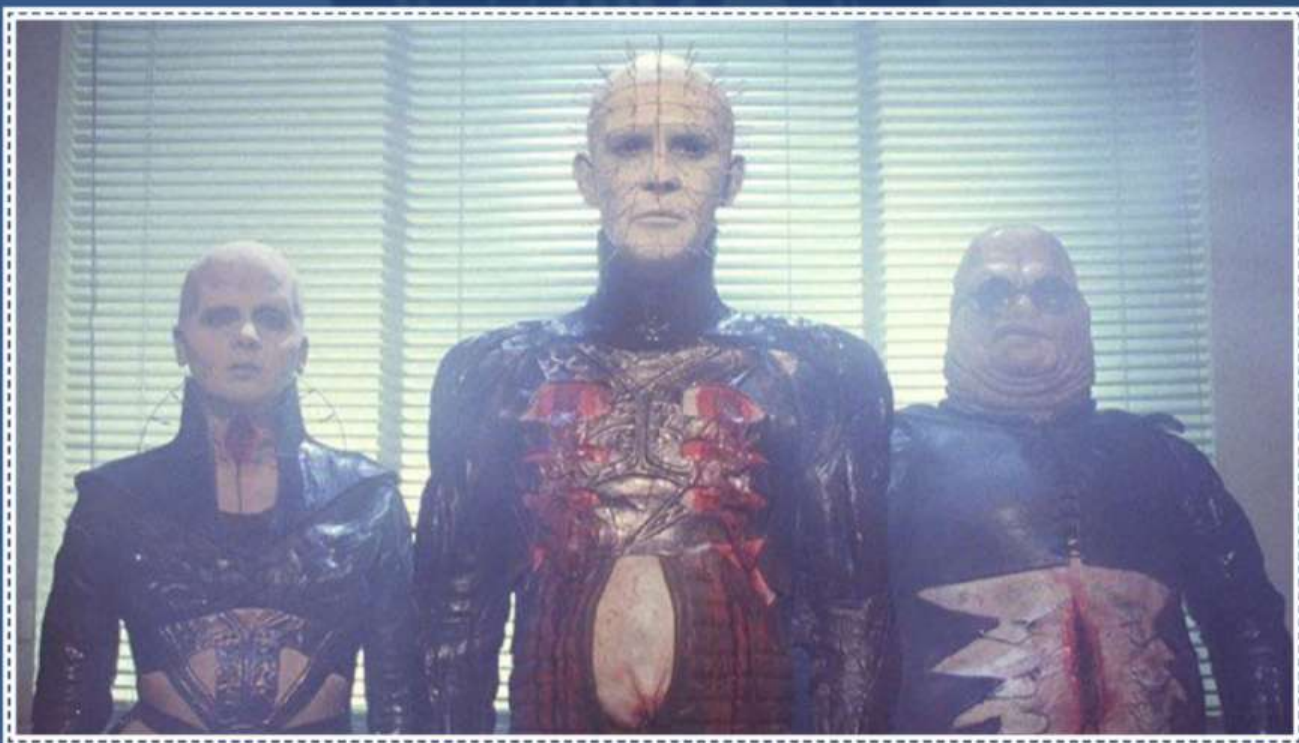
As the third film had been such a stark departure from horror, it only really had one place to go to save it from stagnation; space. Yes, the obligatory sci-fi entry. So much for the final frontier. For purists, *Bloodline* is the last in the series, and it's hard to argue with their reasoning. It was the last entry to enjoy a theatrical release, and, more crucially, the last to have any major involvement with Clive Barker.

The following four films were a further decline into mediocrity. As Barker hadn't an inkling of the film's potential for success, he signed away the story and character rights before *Hellraiser* was even released. The beast was cut loose of its creator. Although reduced to a footnote after the second film, Ashley Laurence returned for the 2002 outing, *Hellseeker*. Director Rick Bota would also hold the reigns for the next two

additions, *Deader* and *Hellworld*, both in 2005. And then in 2011, *Revelations* happened. For the first time in the series history, Doug Bradley did not undergo the tiring make-up process to become Pinhead. Instead, the mantle was taken up by Stephan Smith Collins, and voiced by prolific voice actor Fred Tatasciore. The series had well and truly had it.

Bloated franchise syndrome may have quelled *Hellraiser*'s reputation, and market saturation has all but diluted Pinhead's greatness, but for our money, the first film is British horror's finest hour. The long gestating remake, which Barker himself has claimed he will write and direct, even boasts a homecoming for Doug Bradley. It's all quiet on the Cenobite front, with details dubiously thin on the ground, but we hope it'll be a return to form, because jump scares just aren't doing it.

The original trilogy is unleashed on Blu-ray in the UK for the first time in HELLRAISER: THE SCARLET BOX from Arrow Video on October 26th.





by Martin Unsworth

Andrew Lee Potts

Despite being primarily known as an actor and a regular on TV screens as Connor Temple in *PRIMEVAL* ANDREW LEE POTTS is a prolific and passionate writer and director. His latest project is a web series, available for free on YouTube, called *WIRELESS*. We caught up with him to find out about this and more

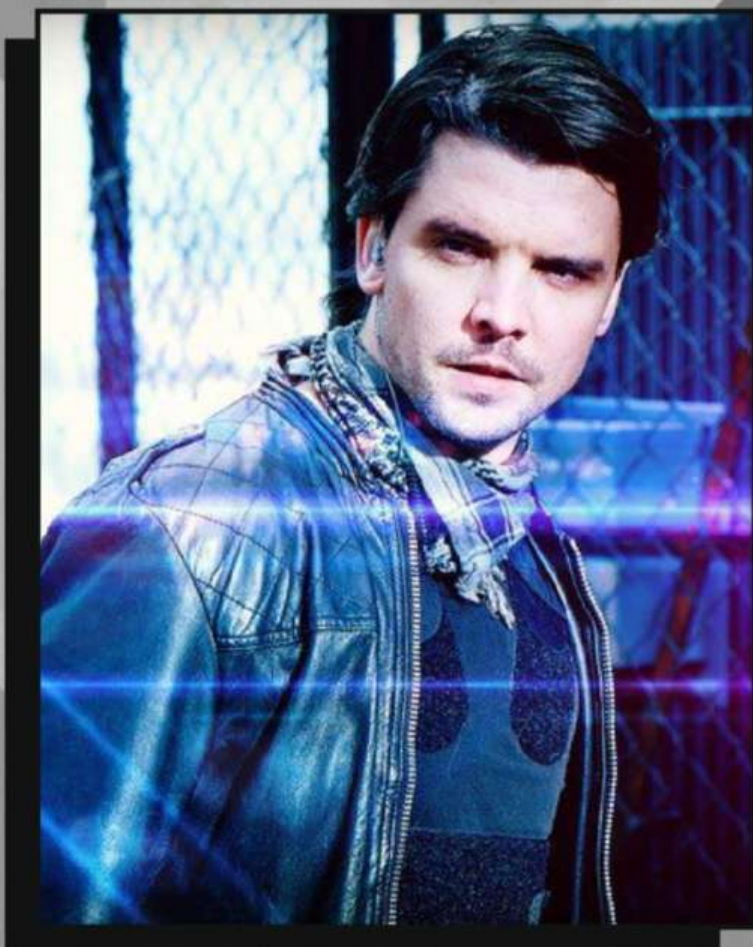
STARBURST: You've had your own company, Keychain Productions, for a while now and did quite a few shorts before *Wireless*, do you prefer directing to acting?

Andrew Lee Potts: I started in 2006 doing shorts! I wouldn't say I prefer it; it's not completely different, but my understanding of acting has helped me direct, and my understanding of directing has helped me act! They kind of go hand in hand, so I would feel that my understanding of acting is so much stronger now than it ever has been and obviously I appreciate everybody's role in a production. When you're a younger actor, you don't really. You're so excited about what you're doing that you're just focusing on that. But the world is massive when you film a film or a TV show, and as the years have gone on, I've really taken an interest in every angle; whether it's the prop makers, Video OPs or directors. A lot of directors I've worked with will probably say I'm more on their side. It makes me work a lot harder for them.

So, I love them both; I get different things from them. I like seeing a picture come from beginning to end. Having a creative idea, having visuals in my head, and making it come to fruition makes me feel uber-proud inside. It's really hard work, but I'm a grafter. I like a bit of work!

So, tell us a little bit about *Wireless* and how that came about

I work a lot with Alex Moss, who writes a lot of the stuff we make together. We basically create the ideas together. I'll ring him and say, I've had a wicked idea, let's start to put it down on paper. He starts that, then he comes to me, and I'll say this is right, that's not right, let's swap and change those bits, so we created quite a lot of things together including the short films. We've been working together a while, he actually helped me produce *The Making of Primeval*, which they asked me to do for Series Two, which was fun. So towards the end of *Primeval*, I was shooting in Dublin and we came up with this idea of this AI and this cop that we wanted to stick together. It's gone through loads of changes over the years and that's to do with how we bring it to screen, really. We really like this idea and I wanted to use what I'd learnt with being in *Primeval*. I'd learnt that the humour is massively important. The British love it when you just don't take it too seriously. You have a serious situation, but there's an edge of humour to it. You do get out-and-out dramas, but that's not how we'd handle things! You often have to crack a joke - it does help the mood. It brings you back to ground level and you say let's try to deal with this now. We wanted to create this high concept show, that was character driven, and also had a lot of drama and humour equally.



WIRELESS



It's quite an unusual approach putting the show on YouTube for free, do you think that's sustainable?

Don't know! [laughs] All I've ever done is put my stuff out free on YouTube. I know a lot of people enter into festivals, this that and the other and I've never done that. I've always just wanted the audience's opinion, that's all I've ever done. It's been brilliant. I've got a donation button on my website, and I couldn't believe the donations that I was getting to help me make it, which was so lovely. In the first year it was up, it was just awesome. People were being just so unbelievably generous and coming back and going, listen, I've wanted to help you for so many years, I've enjoyed what you've done and now I've got an opportunity and that was really, really cool for me. So I never put it out there to make money or anything. It's starting to change for me as I entered *Little Larry* into Virgin Media and got to the final, entered *Photo Finish* into Reed and won the Grand Prix, so I'm starting to go, oh maybe I should enter into stuff.

It's funny, because I did enter *Wireless* into Raindance, and we're an official selection; so we'll see if it'll be screened and might get nominated, who knows? It's just cool it's going to get out there. As for the YouTube thing, I kind of like it at the moment. Obviously, it costs me money to make. I don't make any money from it, so down the line, it

would be awesome if we had a sponsor or something to help us make it. But at the moment, I'm so passionate about it, I enjoy putting it out there for free. I don't know whether it's sustainable or not, but you never know, maybe the right pair of eyes will spot it. I meet so many great young filmmakers and people are in contact with me all the time, and it's so amazingly lovely, and I love it so much when they get in touch and say you're the reason I started making my own films, or you gave me the confidence to make my own films online. I've got the opinion that if you've got an idea, and you can get hold of a camera, you can do it. I know *Wireless* looks quite high quality, and I've made it that way, but that's just through years of practice and working out how to tweak stuff. It doesn't need to look amazing, if the idea's good and you get yourself some good actors - even if it's your friends - it's more about content, it's about people connecting with your characters or your story, and it can work. I learnt that with winning the Reed competition - it's a locked-off camera shot in a photo booth, that's it! You connect with the characters, it's got a beginning, middle, and a strong end and I guess it delivers, so you can do it!

It can just be a simple set-up, and all sorted in the edit

Yeah, and with *Wireless*, it's ALL in

the edit, which I do! Which is great, but obviously, it's amazingly time-consuming to do all the digital effects and that kind of stuff. And also, because I'm self-taught, I'm learning every single time I do an episode. The world's growing bigger with *Wireless*, and I'm trying to push it further and further. It's great, though - I prefer to be learning than not!

What's the end goal for *Wireless*?

To tell the story! In this season, the episodes keep pushing on, and getting a bit longer and longer, so we're having to cut and change them a little bit. The original plan was about 15/16 episodes to tell the first season story. We know where it ends, and really want to get to that point. Then I guess, I'd reassess to see where I'm at, and see if anybody's interested. For instance, I shoot it all on GoPro - I've not even approached them, or told them about it or anything yet, so you never know, somebody could help us out with it. The audience is growing quite consistently, so that's cool. And obviously, I do some comic cons and try to spread the word around the country which really helps. Kind of the old-school way. I'm totally happy to spread the word around about *Wireless*.

And people respect that, rather than some big studio forcing it down their throat
Exactly! It's their choice whether they want



to see it or not. Sometimes people say you've got to watch this, this is good and the response from people I've given a card with the website on to, people come back to me and go, actually, to be fair, I really enjoyed that.

We wanted to flashback before the title sequence, so you get that little bit more of the world, and then you're in the day it's set on, and at the end there's always a hook that I'll hopefully make you go, I have to watch the next one now.

They're very bite-sized, so it's not too much to take in

Yeah, it's like a show you can watch on your iPhone (or whatever brand of phone you have), it looks great, so you can watch on the way home from work or something like that. It's being able to dip into that, with the episodes being between six and nine minutes. Some of them might have to be a little bit longer just to do the story as it unfolds, but then some might be a bit shorter! Each one's very different from the last, which is cool.

Do you have a set timescale for when the next episode will be up?

I hope it doesn't get too frustrating for people! There could be a month or two months between episodes; the reason for that being that I use actors for free, and they are all really successful, and all really busy. For instance, we were just about to

start filming episode seven, and I've lost my actor to a film in L.A. at the moment. So what we've had to do was jump out of sequence and shoot something else. So it's all to do with their availability, and also mine as well, because obviously I've got to do the day job!

The self-funded aspect must give you a lot of freedom?

It gives me all the freedom, but it throws up all the problems as well, but that is part of the challenge I've become a bit addicted to. The whole thing has gone from Unit White being an actual physical presence in the car to how cool it would be to be the car. There are obviously parallels – you could go, oh, is it a bit too much like *Knight Rider*? I actually think it's nothing like *Knight Rider* at all, but you have to watch it to see that. It's not actually a talking car; this AI can travel through any wireless device, which you're going to see in the next few episodes. We've worked out a way for me to leave the car for quite a long time and Unit White to be with me, so that's quite exciting, I'm looking forward to doing that aspect of it. Locations are problematic, because everything costs money. But I wanted a way to show London and not have to shed out loads of money all the time. And I thought, what better way than to be in a car because I can drive everywhere. Just like we're used to watching *Stop! Camera!*

Action or whatever, we're so used to seeing those dashboard shots in the car, because everybody's got cameras even cyclists have them on their heads so if you enter that world of everybody's got a camera, and she can travel wirelessly between any of them, you can see pretty much everything you'd like to see, and it still keeps it between an able budget for me because there's no rules. As long as I stick to that formula, in a sense, and not get too ridiculous with it. We've just shot a scene, and wondered how can we have a street-level shot and we realised there's cameras in cash points, so it could be that she got into the cash point and she can view me from there. Look around you; it's scary how many cameras there are!

It certainly is! The possibilities could potentially be endless

I like the idea, because I've got the Gambits coming into it, who are like my elite hackers from Europe; there's a team of five of them. Casper, who designed Unit White, was originally a part of them, but they're kind of black hat and white hat at the same time, so are they good – are they bad? What will they do for the right sort of money? But because they're so clever at what they do, they're going to become an integral part of helping me on my days journeys as the Government and forces that be start working against me a bit. I don't want to give too much away, but the

world around me is starting to crumble and what I thought I was supposed to be doing, I'm not. So why on earth has Jacob Crow specifically been put with Unit White on this one Installation Day and why's everybody going this is bad?

There have been hints about that throughout
Yeah, if you think back to the first episode, when you see during the war and the attack at the beginning by the robot thing, there are things that people haven't even noticed about that section. When you hear it later, you have to go back and oh god they *did* say that at that point amidst loads of shouting.

The world of *Wireless* is getting bigger, I've got more and more people prop makers, costume designers as it gathers momentum, and this is what I was hoping for it, and people see it and enjoy it, they want to be a part of it and offer up their services. It's happening nearly on a weekly basis. People are getting in touch and saying 'I can help'. With that in mind, the world of *Wireless* is actually getting bigger! It's funny, because I kind of sit there and go, 'ooo I made this!'

One of your early shorts, *Blood on Benefits*, is an amazingly atmospheric horror tale, is that a genre you'd like to return to as a director?

It's funny, because I wrote *Blood on Benefits* as a film with my best friend Tony Denman, who's American, and - bearing in mind it was before *Twilight* - we thought it would be an amazing idea to have a little colony of vampires all on benefits, all living on a council estate, and actually trying to get on with their day to day lives. It wasn't a comedy - it was dark! Within that, a guy gets put in there in a safe house, he's in witness protection, so he realises bit

by bit they're all vampires. And drama unfolds. We were really excited about that at the time, and then I shot *Blood on Benefits*. My last day of shooting was the day of my final recall for *Primeval*. So I shot through the night and then went for my recall. So when I got *Primeval* that took over, the film got put on the backburner, which was a shame because I thought we had something cool there. And by the time we got back round to it, *Twilight* had been released and we thought, 'oh, it looks like we're jumping on the bandwagon.'

I do like vampires, though. I did a movie for Syfy called *Vampire Nation*, where I played Johnny Harker, a descendent but with two desert eagle guns, which is fun.

I'm sure I will revisit it, but I might give it some time as I think everyone's a bit bored of vampires.

It's funny because all these things *Ex_Machina*, *Her* are all similar to *Wireless*, but we thought of *Wireless* in 2008; I feel like I'm at the right time to be delivering it to an audience, because people are enjoying exploring the whole AI thing. The difference with our AI is that it has the pulse, which is the ability to learn emotion, which is obviously dangerous; once you feel love, you can't just switch it off. As you see in episode six, she starts to get angry and throw her toys out of the pram, which is dangerous when you've got that sort of power. And her power is just going to get stronger and stronger. She feels emotion like a human being so she doesn't quite know how to deal with it but that's going to bring other characters into the show to help me deal with it.

Other than continuing *Wireless*, what else do you have in the pipeline?

I've just done Stan Lee's *Lucky Man* for Sky

1. It's about a cop who has the superpower of luck. James Nesbitt is playing that and I come into the story about half way through and I can't really say much more than that! It was fun to do and great to be involved in a Stan Lee thing. It should be a really interesting show.

I will be developing a *longer* short film, to enter into the festivals at some point, and that will be a *Black Mirror*-esque type thing. That's what I enjoy, working and exploring.

So winning the Grand Prix must have been good?

Oh, it literally took my breath away! It was lovely. It was almost like after all the years of work I've done, to be acknowledged was really special. And because it was at BAFTA, there were eight judges that decided it and I was up against some big CGI stuff; my film was really little and simple. It said something about them that all they wanted to watch was a story that made sense and entertained them. We watch so many multi-million pound films that have *literally* lost the plot! It's just frustrating, isn't it? Audiences are frustrated. We come out of the cinema, they might get their figures and such, but people around you are going, 'yeah, that didn't make any sense'. It's nice to see all the effects and stuff, but at the end of the day, all we want to do from being kids is hear a good story. One that makes sense or we can relate to, and that has an end.

You can find out more about Andrew's films by checking out:

keychainproductions.co.uk,

and follow him on Twitter

@Andrewleepotts and **@wireless_web.**

WIRELESS can be viewed for free on YouTube.





WIRELESS

**WIRELESS (ONGOING WEB SERIES) /
DIRECTOR: ANDREW LEE POTTS /
SCREENPLAY: ALEX MOSS / STARRING:
ANDREW LEE POTTS, LUCY BROWN,
JOSEPH MILLSON, MAX WROTTESELEY,
LINDSAY ARMAOU, CAMILLA ARFWEDSON
/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW VIA YOUTUBE**

With technology taking over almost every aspect of modern living, the premise of this snappy web series couldn't be more apt, or relatable.

Set in the present day, we're introduced to Jacob Crow (Potts), a Detective Constable in the Met who has just been assigned a new partner following a suspension for reckless driving. Unfortunately for him, it's in the form of an artificial intelligence embedded in his police-issue car. Unit White (voiced by Brown) is the latest initiative developed in policing; connected wirelessly to every server at the police's disposal (and no doubt more as the series goes along), it's a mine of information and capable of profound data capture and manipulation. In the first episode, we discover that Unit White has the ability to learn and respond to Jacob's personality and humour. But it's not the situation he'd like to be in; he's a traditional, get-to-it copper, ready for action and prepared to bend a few rules to get the job done, so being analysed and under surveillance certainly doesn't sit well with him.

What we find as we go along is that there's a specific reason that Jacob - a rebellious officer with a history - has been chosen for this assignment, reasons that go back to a military raid that went wrong in 2003. With six episodes currently available to view, the plot is thickening and is becoming incredibly intriguing.

Filmed entirely on portable GoPro cameras (with some additional aerial shots), *Wireless* looks very slick and stylised; post-production digital effects and filters make it appear so much more expensive and visually striking. But forgetting the gimmicks, it's the compelling story and persona of Potts' Jacob Crow that retains the attention and makes the viewer eager for the next episode. These being such concise and succinct chapters, it's far too easy to fly through them and reach the end of what's already available far too quickly. The problem with that, of course, is that we may have some time to wait for the subsequent parts of the story. As frustrating as this can be, it's certainly going to be worth the time.

As a piece of sci-fi storytelling, it's not too distanced from reality. Most modern cars are equipped with computers, so it's no stretch of the imagination to think that the AI we see (or hear) in *Wireless* is not too far away. Whether that's a good thing or not is certainly up for debate, as we see in the latter episodes, with Unit White developing not only a sense of humour but an attachment to Jacob that could be dangerous when it comes to making rational and legal decisions.

The short and sharp way of drip-feeding elements of the narrative - important information is included in the pre-credit sequences and recaps - is fascinating in that it allows the viewer to decipher many of the secrets hinted at and speculate on the motives of the characters.

Slickly edited, *Wireless* is everything one could want from a modern sci-fi show, and should be supported as much as possible. If the remaining episodes continue as strong as the first six, it'll be something special indeed.



HAMMER DOUBLE- FEATURE SEASON

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I WILL MAKE YOU A MAN...

By Samantha Ward

THE CLASSIC GOTHIC TEXT IS REVISITED ONCE MORE, THIS TIME WITH MORE VISUALLY APPEALING LEADS IN JAMES MCAVOY AND DANIEL RADCLIFFE. CAN VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN BRING LIFE TO THE BOX OFFICE?

Yet another version of Mary Shelley's beloved 1818 novel *Frankenstein* is primed to be given life on the big screen, entitled *Victor Frankenstein*. We need not have to remind everyone of the fact that it was not so long ago *I, Frankenstein* made its way into the cinema to a rather appalled audience. Unsurprisingly, it flopped at the box office. It seems that a new take in such quick succession should surely be welcomed; on the other hand, digging up the same grave time and time again would possibly make it difficult to create something new out of such an over-used tale.

Looking back at many of these adaptations, they merely take the ideas and main plot of Shelley's story, becoming their own tales in live action. After adapting Peggy Webling's 1927 play, notable for naming the creature Frankenstein after its creator (there after causing confusion amongst audiences), Universal Pictures was the first company to bring the monster to the big screen in 1931. This starred the legendary Boris Karloff, whose iconic portrayal of the creature is now what springs to most minds at the mention of Frankenstein. Not only is it a gem of a monster movie, but it started a tidal wave of Frankenstein films and spurred other production companies to do their own take on the creature feature. Hammer Films had a smash at it with many different takes, beginning with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957). There have even been female interpretations of the monster with Universal's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and Hammer's *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967). Even the 1994 *Mary Shelley's*

Frankenstein, directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, though considered the most faithful adaptation, still had several changes to the plot. With so many variations of the mad scientist and his creature, what haven't we seen already? A different perspective, maybe?

In this 2015 adaptation, the story is told through the eyes of Igor (Daniel Radcliffe), the hunched assistant of young medical student Victor Von Frankenstein, portrayed by James McAvoy. With his own passion for anatomy and science, Igor tells the tale of his friendship with Frankenstein, his own dark origins and, of course, the madness of Frankenstein's experiments. Frankenstein finds Igor in rather poor conditions, but soon takes him away from that, inventing a back brace allowing Igor to walk straight. Igor's life is changed and for the better, it seems. Thus their adventures begin, as these two highly intelligent students become a fascinating dynamic duo in the world of science. Their friendship is strained, however, when Victor becomes obsessed with his latest experiment in which morals are broken as well as the law. As the doctor becomes more and more consumed by madness, Igor is left to pick up the pieces but struggles to save his friend from going to prison, or worse, insane. The film is blessed with a terrific British cast including Charles Dance (*Game of Thrones*), Andrew Scott and Mark Gatiss, who both starred in *Sherlock*. To little surprise, Radcliffe and McAvoy have put a lot of energy and charisma into their characters. Both actors have made huge names for themselves and will undoubtedly

**VICTOR
FRANKENSTEIN**

bring new audiences to the world of Frankenstein. They seem to be more accessible for the audience to relate to, as the focus seems to revolve around the characters as much as the story.

Victor Frankenstein has been adapted by Max Landis, known for the screenplays of *Chronicle* and the more recent *American Ultra*; it's plain to see he has succeeded in rejuvenating this classic Gothic story. Landis seems to have weaselled some of his own contemporary style into the dialogue with camaraderie and dark humour, but it still befits the Gothic period. Shelley's book is described as a Gothic romance, and many adaptations portray the heartache and lustre that Shelley created in her world. The characters in *Victor Frankenstein* are young adults who appear to be rather naive in the concept of love, so this does not seem to be a large theme at play. Having said that, with Jessica Brown Findlay amongst the cast, there must be a little budding romance in the works. Director Paul McGuigan has previously worked on a lot of television shows including the recent, modern *Sherlock* adaptation, showing he has a knack for revitalising classic characters for a modern audience as well as working with in-depth character relationships. It will be interesting to see what he does with this classic, so no pressure. McGuigan has said he wants to bring the name back to the doctor as so many people mistake Frankenstein for being the creation - the title itself enforces that. So it sounds like it's off to a good start.

Among the spark of humour in this Gothic horror, there's a great rapport between the eccentric duo, with plenty of witty banter thrown back and forth. It's likely that Landis has been influenced very much by Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974), an adaptation neither to be missed nor forgotten. One particular line from the trailer, where Frankenstein corrects the pronunciation of his name, feels like a direct throwback to the comedy horror. Landis has definitely kept close the ideologies that have developed over time through many adaptations of the legendary tale, but he has done so in a somewhat a modern and naturalistic way that we should be able to accept it light-heartedly. Be that as it may, there are dark themes of abuse and manipulation, much like Mary Shelley's original story. Its core idea is to examine what drives a person to the extreme through an unhealthy obsession. This film definitely delves into the harrowing concerns of mentality and its effect on relationships. The audience may warm to these characters who eventually put themselves in great peril, but it is



uncertain that the film will contain the right balance of fun and furore.

There is no doubt that this is a period of unrest and suffering, and when entering the new world of scientific discovery there is a lot to be played around with in terms of spectacle. The sets for the film look more than lavish as they certainly suit the Victorian era and the chilling Gothic theme. The CGI effects look striking, creating the world where science is daringly taken to frightening new heights. It has a science fiction gleam to it, as the gadgets and machinery look majestic and fantastical, giving the film an otherworldly feel. The little that we have seen of the creation/creature so far looks to be something horrific and certainly deadly. Make-up and wardrobe look to have done an outstanding job despite Radcliffe's terrible hairdo.

It seems to be a rather refreshing take as this film expands majorly on the relationship between the mad scientist and his assistant Igor, who has never before been explored on such a personal level. With their combined devotion to science and the creation of life, they appear to make a great gruesome twosome. We all know the ultimate endgame is to create life, though this is also a story about self-destruction. What becomes of Igor and the friendship between him and Frankenstein is what seems most interesting about this adaptation. It's exciting to have the chance at exploring a new dynamic and a fresh perspective.

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN hits UK cinemas on December 4th.



HORROR
Obscura

'Tis the season of ghosts, goblins and ghoulies so the jannock John Townsend casts his attention to how HORROR CHANNEL will be celebrating Samhain...

HALLOWEEN SMALL SCREEN CHILLS



horrorchannel

Horror Channel are the only channel solely dedicated to broadcasting genre films, specifically horror and sci-fi, in the UK, Ireland and Italy. As such it would be reasonable to expect that their Halloween schedule would be something special. What you may not have been expecting was how eclectic and exciting the line-up would be. Accepted classics are screening alongside lesser-known films, with some premieres of exciting features that may have passed you by.

The programming runs right the way through October, with an early showing of what is one of the greatest horror films of all time; Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*. This brooding, haunting adaptation of a Daphne du Maurier short story requires little introduction; but for many people, it could have been a while since their last sitting, so it's one worth revisiting. Another film worthy of the modern classic moniker is John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*. This end-of-the-world horror from the legendary director is perhaps one of his most overlooked films, but is one that more than most showcases Carpenter's unique blend of music and terror.

Most interestingly, though, are a couple of films very few will have seen. Blair Erickson's *Banshee Chapter* is a terrifying, jump-out-of-your-seat horror film, and one that has not yet received the audience it deserves. Produced by *Star Trek*'s Zachary Quinto, it's full of familiar genre references, and in some cases even scenes you may have seen before, but it's the skill with which these are woven together that sets this film apart. A simple premise of an aspiring journalist joining forces with a Hunter S.

Thompson/Truman Capote-esque figure to uncover government experimentation is pretty formulaic too, but as they delve deeper into the mystery the terror increases and their own sanity comes under question. The jump scares are at times too predictable and yet are hugely effective, and there is one particular scene set in a basement that is so tense as to make drawing breath difficult.

With convincing performances throughout, and with a terrifically paranoid turn from the legendary Ted Levine (Buffalo Bill himself!), *Banshee Chapter* is a film that will linger long in the memory, just make sure you watch it in the dark.

At the other end of the horror spectrum is the brooding drama *Dark Summer*, based around a young man placed under house arrest for his involvement in a cyber-crime. As he struggles with his incarceration, he begins to suffer visions which become increasingly malevolent. There is a palpable discomfort generated by Paul Solet's intrusive direction, with a real sense of claustrophobic creepiness amidst the fear of what may or may not be haunting young Daniel. Solet has spoken about his vision for the film;

Firstly he's [Daniel] isolated, which alone could do it and there have been a number of horror movies where isolation has provided a very specific point of view. In addition to that, though, he has all these other things going on. There's the question about his medication; there's a deep love for a woman that was never reciprocated and then there's this weird emerald green presence that you never

know if it's him cracking up or some kind of supernatural presence.

At the centre of *Dark Summer* is a stunning, dysfunctional performance from Keir Gilchrist as the troubled Daniel. Rarely will you see such a potentially awkward role inhabited with such conviction, and it is much to the credit of Solet that he has drawn such an affecting performance from his young lead. As with *Banshee Chapter*, there is a superb supporting turn, this time from the incomparable Peter Stormare, who revels in the mystery of his character as Daniel's anarchic parole officer who may or may not be a positive influence.

With stylish portent that is hard to categorise, *Dark Summer* subtly preys on an audience's inherent fears, which simply adds to the shocking horror later in the film.

As the two films described above demonstrate, the real joy of any channel's seasonal programming is in the discovery of something new. *Cassadaga* is another certainly worth checking out, as a deaf woman's connection with a murdered young woman leads to the discovery of a serial killer who makes marionette dolls out of his victims. Hauntingly creepy in places, this micro-budget film from director Anthony DiBlasi is a perfect example of how to create a foreboding atmosphere through clever camera work and impressive design. If found footage is to your taste, then *Grave Encounters* is a credible example. Although formulaic in its premise, as a ghost hunting reality television crew lock themselves in an apparently haunted mental asylum, the



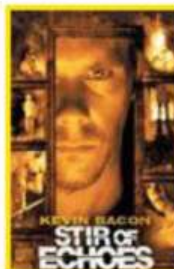
scares are bold, brash and unavoidable, even for the toughest cynic of the format. You may know what's coming, but you'll still kick yourself for falling for it! This is a film that does exactly what it sets out to do, however basic its horror beats are.

With more than 20 new and classic films added to Horror Channel's schedule in the build up to Halloween, you should think of this as your own personal horror film festival, brought direct to your living room. There's no need to venture out in the cold to the local cinema, no payment is necessary and there will never be a queue at the toilets. Take our advice; get in some beer, wine or creepy cocktail of choice, stock up with a few of your favourite scary snacks and turn out the lights. If nothing else, you have the chance to watch an old favourite such as *Don't Look Now* or *Prince of Darkness*. The likelihood is you'll discover something entirely new, a film you may never even have heard of such as *Banshee Chapter* or *Dark Summer*, and one that may make you hide behind the nearest cushion or leave you with an unshakeable sense of unease.

Whatever your preference there will be something of interest in the Halloween line-up from Horror Channel. Take a chance and seek out something new and different from the films above. Remember, horror is healthy, being scared is good for you, and nightmares never last long...

Happy Halloween...

For more information on HORROR CHANNEL'S HAUNTED HALLOWEEN season, check out the website horrorchannel.co.uk.



ALSO SHOWING



If you go down to the woods today, you'll be sure of nasty surprise - as we find out in director CORIN HARDY's demonic creaturefest **THE HALLOW**

A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHTMARE

BY ANDREW MARSHALL

There was once a time when elves and fairies drove terror into the hearts of man. Their names, if not avoided entirely, were spoken in hushed reverence and fearful whispers. Then came Tolkien with his reinterpretation of the Fair Folk as androgynous pretty boys and elegant warrior maidens; a notion further popularised by *Dungeons & Dragons*. But make no mistake, these creatures were once feared beings of nightmare, a lost perception that *The Hallow* seeks to restore.

As many horrors movies do, *The Hallow* begins rather innocuously, with English city couple Adam and Clare moving with their new-born baby to the Irish countryside for Adam's forestry surveying job. However, all is not as it seems in the quiet rural village. The aggressive townsfolk's talk of primal woodland forces soon proves to be more than just the superstition of backward country yokels, and the forest marked for sale and destruction is soon revealed to be inhabited by creatures that are swift to vent their wrath on any who encroach upon their sacred domain.

Director Corin Hardy's aim was to tell a modern day fairy tale, a story with supernatural themes but grounded in reality, creating a link between the impalpable world of folklore and the grim mundanity of reality that adhered to an established set of rules and fit into our own world in a way that made contextual sense. Delving into the vast expanse of Celtic mythology, inspiration was found in stories such as those of

the body-snatching changelings, the doom-harbinger banshees and the Daoine S'dhe, whose anger can be brought down from a single provocation, however slight or unwitting it might be, if they feel the lowly humans are lacking in the proper respect. The Unseelie Court are spiteful and malevolent, and delight in toying with the brief mortals as a cat will torture its terrified prey.

Originally pitched as *Straw Dogs* meets *Pan's Labyrinth*, as the film progresses it gradually transforms

from the relationship drama of its central spouses into the dark fantasy thriller such a fusion invokes, passing through numerous subgenres on the way in an organic flow, the music and cinematography growing ever more ethereal. With much of the film effectively a two-hander between its leads, it required actors with whom the audience could identify. Hardy had been a big fan of Joseph Mawle for years, finding that although he often appears in supporting roles, he was possessed of an intense charisma, and one that





gave him the quiet everyman confidence required for Adam. As Clare, Bojana Novakovic was the result of searching for someone who could bring an emotional connection to the story while also exuding a cinematic presence that kept her engaging, particularly during the parts of the film when she is alone. Together, the pair play off each other in a believable fashion, portraying a couple that anyone watching could perceive themselves to be a part of, and with the whole film told from their shared and individual perspectives, we are brought along on the same journey as the presence of the fairies and the elemental powers of nature begin to affect them in differing ways.

Aside from the encroaching supernatural menace, there are only two other characters of note. Local farmer Colm is representative of the viewpoint of the locals, and whereas the other

villagers offer only silent contempt, he has no qualms about voicing his opinions regarding how reckless and misguided he believes the actions of the foolish English couple to be, and how unwelcome their continued presence is in the village, every moment they spend there a compounding threat to the fragile tranquility of the rural settlement. Of all the actors auditioned for the role, Michael McElhatton was the only one Hardy felt brought the requisite passion to the performance. Initially evoking just as much menace as he does as *Game of Thrones* callous patriarch Roose Bolton, our perception of Colm is later inverted upon the discovery that, without wishing to give too much away, he has his own reasons to be wary of the fairies and vigilant against doing anything that might draw their lethal attention. Davey, appearing for a single scene and played by the chameleonic Michael Smiley, is a local Garda and, in a

counterpoint to Colm, gives an outsider's perspective of the village. While not necessarily convinced that the tales of the supernatural have any truth to them, he still has a respect for the old stories and the power they hold over people's beliefs, tacitly suggesting to Adam and Clare that a change in attitude might be best for all concerned before something happens one way or the other.

What sets *The Hallow* apart from many contemporary horror movies is its heavy use of practical effects. The ubiquity of CGI in modern filmmaking has inured many audiences against the achievement of creating visual effects, always aware on some level of the artificiality of what they are perceiving. Hardy, however, is a fan of the old school, and of the belief that practical effects give viewers a more personal connection to a film, allowing the loving craftwork of the filmmakers to be seen in every moment in spite of any variance in quality. Ropey though they may be, who doesn't love the early films of Sam Raimi or Peter Jackson?

It was precisely that relationship of shared passion that Hardy sought to establish with his audience. Physical creations were used as much as possible to portray the fairies, with the work overseen by John Nolan, an effects technician on the likes of *Harry Potter* and *Hellboy II*, utilising various combinations of monster-suited performers, prosthetics, puppetry, stop-motion and animatronics to make up the bulk of the effects work. A small amount of CGI was applied afterwards to streamline the illusions, adding eyes or altering limbs to create slightly off-humanoid representations that your mind feels it should recognise but nevertheless can't quite manage to. The result is eerie and unsettling, and makes it impossible to tell where the physical performances end and the virtual augmentation begins.





Inspired by some of the most revered horror films ever — such as *The Fly*, *The Evil Dead*, *Alien*, and *The Thing* — being made long before filmmakers had access to even the most rudimentary computer enhancement, Hardy felt he had the best of both worlds, possessing both the technology to create the physical monsters in the first place and also the post production processing power to ensure their representation matched his vision. Also taking a cue from the classics, the fairies are only glimpsed briefly in the beginning so that their later exposure in all their grotesque glory has a far greater payoff.

The latter two of the aforementioned films, in particular, are significant touchstones and any conversation with Hardy regarding his influences will see them mentioned multiple times. One set piece seems like a direct homage to John Carpenter's Antarctic horror classic, featuring spider-like appendages rising from amorphous sludge to form vicious needles of animate wood, as nature itself makes its displeasure known against the interloping humans. Similarly, later on in the film, Adam gets a particularly Ripley moment when a memorable scene sees him holding a horde of fairies at bay with a flaming scythe, itself the result of the requirement of a mobile light source for the nocturnal

setting combining with Hardy's desire to create an iconic piece of weaponry to sit alongside the likes of Ash's chainsaw or Freddy Krueger's razor glove. The end result succeeds admirably.

In a genre crowded by innumerable films made in the same ways that rehash ad nauseam the same familiar ideas, *The Hallow* looks to be something truly special. Merging

supernatural terror, body horror, viral contagion, home invasion, creature madness and man vs. nature, Corin Hardy has managed to create an immersive and unique film that just might manage to convince you that in the darkness of the forest where man dares not tread, the monsters are real.

THE HALLOW is released in cinemas on November 13th.



WHEN THE SKULL STRIKES YOU'LL SCREAM!

**PETER
CUSHING**

**PATRICK
WYMARK**

AND **CHRISTOPHER
LEE**

**SPECIAL
EDITION
DUAL FORMAT
AVAILABLE THIS
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MAN'S BEAST FRIEND

By Jack Bottomley

STARBURST looks at the story behind Disney Pixar's long-delayed *THE GOOD DINOSAUR* and wonders if it the magic can continue...

Since that frisky little lamp wanted to play ball in *Luxo Jr.*, the studio known as Pixar has become a powerhouse in the world of computer animation. After releasing their first feature-length film *Toy Story* twenty years ago, the studio has gone on to release a streak of acclaimed films that lasted up until the ill-received *Cars 2* in 2011. Since that point, the studio seems to have had something to prove and a magic to recapture but after accomplishing that feat this July with the studio's form reclaiming emotionally charged masterpiece *Inside Out*, our eyes are on Pixar's second 2015 feature (and sixteenth feature film) *The Good Dinosaur*, which has had an overdue arrival to the big screen to say the least. So as the film is on the horizon, we at STARBURST tell you the story of *The Good Dinosaur* that wanted to be more than good—it wanted to be great!

The official plot for the film is actually a quite sweet, if pretty standard sounding, tale of man (or rather boy) and beast in harmony. Though knowing the guys and gals at Pixar, there will be more going on here than meets the reptilian eye. The film is set in an alternate world where the asteroid that killed the dinosaurs never hit the Earth. The Jurassic star of the film is a young Apatosaurus called Arlo (voiced by 13-year-old actor Raymond Ochoa). Arlo is a friendly young dinosaur who is no stranger to loss, but he is swept away by a river and stranded from his remaining family. As Arlo tries to find his way home to the Clawed-Tooth Mountains, he strikes an unlikely friendship with a human cave boy who he names Spot (Jack Bright). Now reading this plot summary, you could be forgiven for thinking of the possible similarities with the likes of *Ice Age* but *The Good Dinosaur* is likely to be a far different beast.

However, it seems almost ironic that a film that looks so friendly and sounds so unassuming (director Peter Sohn has suggested the title is deceptively simple) has faced so many setbacks in arriving to the big screen. Indeed, the story of *The Good Dinosaur*'s production setbacks has been discussed more than the visually vibrant onscreen tale of boy and beast. The egg that was the premise actually hatched way back in 1964, when the film's original director Bob Peterson (more on that later) visited the New York World's Fair and was wowed by the animatronic dinosaur exhibition as a boy. And as we have become accustomed to, Pixar is good at making dreams a reality, but not since the likes of *The Black Cauldron* has a Disney-backed animated feature faced such a problematic journey to the big screen.

The ball really started rolling for the film in 2009, when a promotional video advertising the forthcoming Pixar masterwork *Up* incidentally gave details of a planned Pixar dinosaur-themed movie. Eagle-eyed (or should that be





Pterodactyl-eyed?) viewers noticed dinosaur-themed designs (sketches and models) in the office of sculptor Greg Dykstra in the video and thus questions began being asked. At this point, the studio had not put a scaly foot wrong and the thought of Pixar going prehistoric was a tantalising prospect. Naturally announcements for Bob Peterson's passion project soon came stomping along. In June 2011, the film (which was as yet untitled) was pencilled in for a November 27th, 2013 release date and even more details (brief plot and crew details) followed at the D23 Expo (Disney Fan Club Exposition) on August 20th, where Peterson and producer John Walker 'officially' (well, they made jokey artwork anyway) called the film *The Untitled Pixar Movie About Dinosaurs*, until the project evolved and officially (properly this time) was named *The Good Dinosaur* on April 24th, 2012.

Thus far, the film had been tottering along in quite unshowy fashion, with most audiences being aware of its existence but not especially as hyped-up about it as other bigger Pixar projects. However,

it was at this point that an asteroid hit the production (metaphorically, that is) and aspects of this dinosaur-centered tale became vastly altered. John Lasseter (*Toy Story 1-2*, *A Bug's Life*) had already discussed the aims to actually have a dinosaur film where the dinosaurs are fully-rounded characters and made the studio's intentions known; the film was going to tell a contemporary story using nature's extinct titans. In fact, the angle of a dinosaur community similar to a human farming colony was an idea being discussed and which has advanced through production. The first real setback came in December 2011 when Disney verified that *Frozen* would be released on November 27th, 2013 and in April 2012, *The Good Dinosaur* was moved back to May 30th, 2014. What seemed like a mere schedule shift would be a sign of things to come.

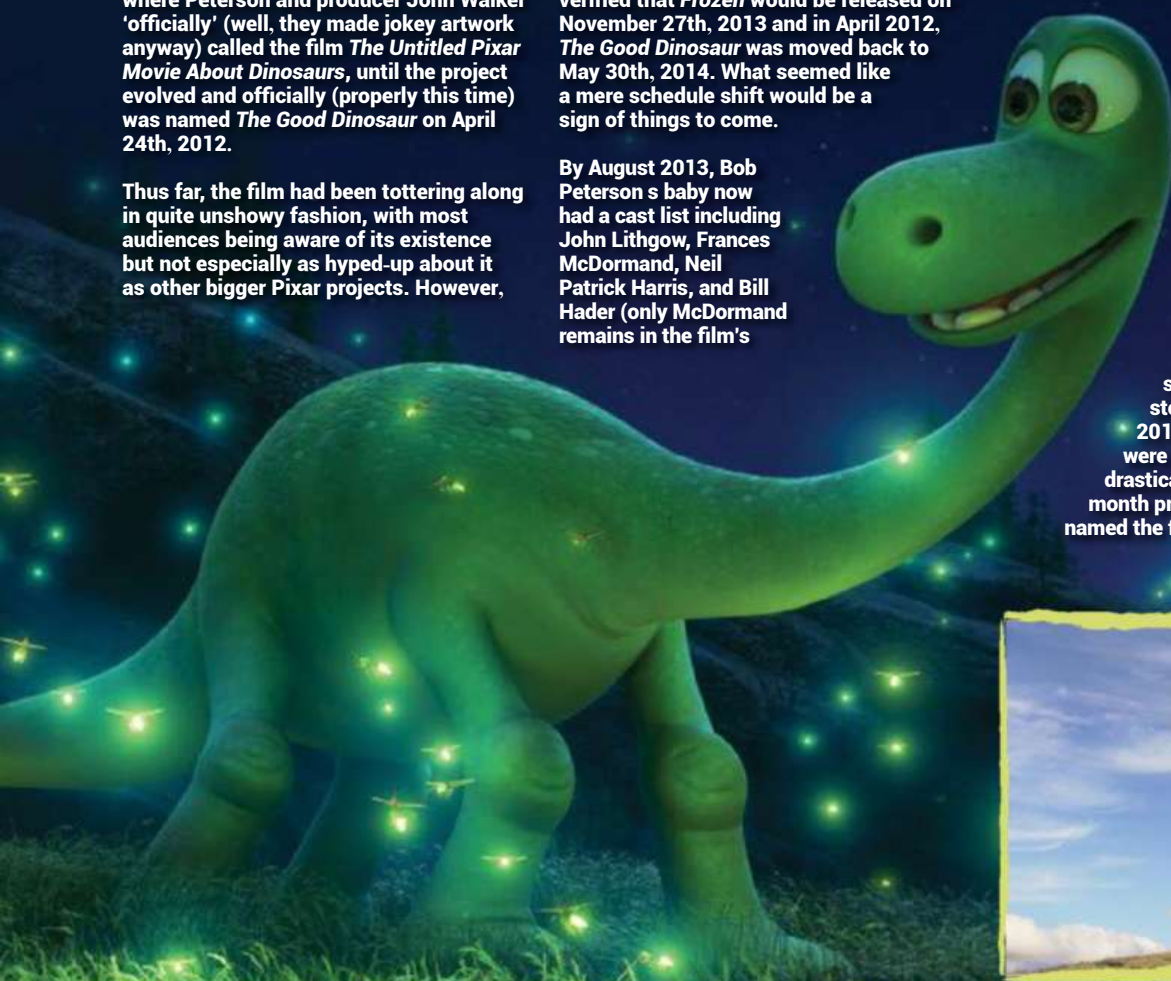
By August 2013, Bob Peterson's baby now had a cast list including John Lithgow, Frances McDormand, Neil Patrick Harris, and Bill Hader (only McDormand remains in the film's

official cast list now) but did not have a script or director. Despite championing the story, Peterson was dropped from the film, as was John Walker. The reason being story problems - especially regarding the final third of the film - and this meant that the plot underwent a flurry of rewrites at the hands of people like John Lasseter, Mark Andrews (*Brave*), Lee Unkrich (*Toy Story 3*) and the movie's final director Peter Sohn (who directed Pixar Short *Partly Cloudy*). The delays and storytelling difficulties compelled the studio to set the film back by over a year, moving their *Finding Nemo* sequel *Dory* to June 2016, to allow *The Good Dinosaur* to take the November 25th, 2015 release date.

As a result of these issues, 67 employees of Pixar lost their jobs in November 2013, in an effort to re-focus the studio (this came only a month after 80 jobs were lost by the closure of Pixar Canada). All of a sudden, it was not looking good for this dinosaur but in the time since (and after their first non-release year since 2005) Pixar worked hard throughout 2014 to revamp the story, with actor John Lithgow stating the story was being completely reimagined. Naturally, alarm bells were ringing for some fans, and why wouldn't they be? Oh so often such

difficulties do not bode well for the finished feature.

Plus the studio's output post *Cars 2* - *Brave*, *Monsters University* - was said to be lacking some of the studio's previous wonder and depth. However, as we have all learnt so many times in the past, never underestimate the power of a dinosaur (*Jurassic World*, anyone?). And after a string of worrying news stories, in November 2014 elements of the script were confirmed as being drastically altered and the month prior, Peter Sohn was named the film's new director.



In the months that have followed, the exact details have remained under wraps but there is no doubting that the issues seem to have been smoothed out. The plot has been re-adjusted by many of the workers at the studio and Enrico Casarosa (who helmed wondrous Pixar short *La Luna*) has been co-credited (with Peterson) for the story. Arlo became far younger as a character and the movie has been drastically re-cast. The colourful artwork that made up all we saw over the last few years has been expanded upon with official images and trailers showing off the characters and further plot details. However, the most promising thing for fans came this year with the feedback from *The Good Dinosaur* footage screened at the Cannes Film Festival in May. In a sneak peek presentation, Lasseter gave audiences insight into the story and the crew's aspiration for it. This taster wowed many critics in attendance. The visual splendor and varied dinosaur characters that evoked a friendlier *Jurassic Park* promised that, despite all the troubles, the film was still very much being passionately brought to life.



Soon after, *Inside Out* hit cinemas and marked the studio's return to universal acclaim. Could this set the tone even more for what we can expect from, as one person called it, this blend of *Tarzan* and *Lilo & Stitch*? Delays may indeed have slowed Arlo and Spot's journey, but this November we can all see whether it was all worth it. It is with a sense of renewed optimism we approach this beautiful-looking film that now features almost an entirely new cast. In addition to the young headlining duo, the movie stars *Fargo*'s Frances McDormand as Momma Ida, *Casino Royale*'s Jeffrey Wright (the part originally intended for John Lithgow) as Poppa Henry, and Sam Elliott (*The Big Lebowski*) as Butch the Tyrannosaurus. Featuring supporting turns by Anna Paquin (*X-Men*) as Ramsey, Marcus Scribner (from TV's *Black-ish*) as Buck, A. J. Buckley (*CSI: NY*) as Nash and Steve Zahn (*Sahara*) as the Pteranodon called Thunderclap.

The film that started out as an untitled

dinosaur movie idea has become one of the studio's greatest challenges of late. A simple idea has grown into what many are suggesting could be a visually ambitious, character-driven, dinosaur adventure that hints at loss, disconnected youth, Amish-like farming communities and the harshness of nature. It may be an effort that did not quite work out, but better to work at bringing a story to life than to abandon it and regret what could have been. In Pixar we trust many have remarked, and as Pixar General Manager and Executive Vice President of Production Jim Morris said, *It was tough on the company. Most studios would have said, 'the movie's fine. It's not bad.' And it wasn't bad; it just wasn't great. We wanted to have a great movie.*" Maybe *The Good Dinosaur* will become greater than good after all; we cannot wait to find out...

THE GOOD DINOSAUR stomps through UK cinemas from the 27th of November.



THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED

REVIEWS



PAN

CERT: PG / **DIRECTOR:** JOE WRIGHT / **SCREENPLAY:** JASON FUCHS / **STARRING:** HUGH JACKMAN, LEVI MILLER, JIMMY VEE, AMANDA SEYFRIED, ROONEY MARA / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Kids being forced to sing Nirvana in Neverland? No thank you very much. When Hugh Jackman's pirate Blackbeard is introduced in Joe Wright's Peter Pan prequel Pan, his minions below him sing grunge's most famous anthem Smells Like Teen Spirit. It begs the question, has Wright been binging on Baz Luhrmann and who thought this would be a good idea?

Taking liberties with source material and beginning in the Blitz as the bombs fall over London, Peter Pan is under the watchful eyes of the nasty nuns at the Lambeth Home for Boys. Dropped there as a baby twelve years earlier by his mother, he dreams of the day she will return to collect him. While the nuns hoard the limited wartime rations and treat the boys like slaves, escape comes one night in the form of pirates bursting through the roof of the orphanage.

Spirited away to Neverland on a flying pirate ship, Peter finds himself imprisoned in the mines where the most feared pirate of all, Hugh Jackman's Captain Blackbeard, rules over his kidnapped victims. While mining for fairy dust which has rejuvenation properties for those who inhale it, Peter hooks up with James Hook and his mate Smee, finds out he is the subject of a prophecy and plots an escape to search for his beloved missing mother.

Pan fans (or just anyone who's ever been to a pantomime) will recognise the character names and Peter's search

takes him across the familiar world of Neverland, meeting the pirate-fighting natives including fearless Tiger Lily (Rooney Mara) and on to find mermaids, crocodiles and fairies. Blackbeard is of course always in hot pursuit with nice guy Hugh Jackman shouting and threatening and trying his very best to be menacing. Meanwhile, Wright shoehorns in some foreshadowing to the J. M. Barrie story we know and love, with Hook being intimidated by a crocodile and Peter getting a brief moment to meet Tinkerbell.

But this is Peter's story and newcomer Levi Miller just about manages to avoid making this look like a big budget stage school production. That's made harder because he's surrounded by overacting, with both Jackman throwing it all out there from beneath an outrageous costume and Garrett Hedlund overdoing the roguish charm of his James Hook. What Hedlund and Jason Fuchs' script fail to do is convincingly hint at the darkness to come in Hook's story. If Pan gets a sequel, the arc of Hook's fall to the dark side will be the real draw, but don't expect much of a hint of the nasty pirate here.

For while there is some menace, and younger children might find the odd moment scary, this is mostly pantomime stuff, just with added lashings of CGI. Typically for a Joe Wright film, Pan looks lovely, particularly when bringing storytelling to life. One early sequence

uses stars to create character imagery, another uses a memory tree to carve out a narrative in wood, and then later water is used to invoke a sort-of flashback to a pivotal moment in Peter's family history. These moments are exquisite, so it's a shame that the action sequences, including a pirate ship dogfight with spitfires over London and the climactic Blackbeard showdown with Peter, are often a bit of a mess of overused CGI.

In contrast, the production design of the natives' territory is wonderful and the multi-coloured costumes of the tribespeople will remind older audiences of what has made Peter Pan and Neverland so enduring all these years. The racist undertones of any previous Peter Pan stories are brushed aside by casting the 'savage' natives as a multi-cultural bunch of jungle dwellers.

Pan manages to tread on the toes of its source material, at the same time as heading into previously unexplored prequel territory only hinted at by J. M. Barrie. It all feels like a set-up for a sequel (where we might get to the good stuff) and if that manages to get Hook's story right, it could be a hell of a lot better than this lively, but flawed flight through Neverland.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED +++++ +++++ **7**

ACTUAL +++++ +++++ **5**



THE MARTIAN

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: RIDLEY SCOTT / SCREENPLAY: DREW GODDARD / STARRING: MATT DAMON, JESSICA CHASTAIN, CHIWETEL EJIOFOR, JEFF DANIELS, SEAN BEAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The recent announcement from NASA scientists finally confirming the presence of running water on the surface of Mars and thus the possibility of at least some primitive form of life existing on the surface of the presumed-dead red planet - isn't exactly a case of life imitating art but it's surely an example of life acting as a handy promotional tool for a brand new movie. Not that Ridley Scott's astonishing *The Martian* - the director's most assured and downright enjoyable movie in a decade or more - is going to need a big publicity push to get bums on seats. *The Martian* is this year's *Gravity* - a story of human survival in impossible circumstances - but in terms of its scope, scale, high stakes and sheer visceral, visual power and beauty it leaves Alfonso Cuarón's off-Earth adventure squirming in the space dust (if such a thing were to exist - and after the Mars/water revelation, surely anything's possible?).

The Martian is sensitively adapted by Drew Goddard from Andy Weir's unputdownable powerhouse page-turner. Astronaut/botanist Mark Watney is left behind when his expeditionary team is forced to leave Mars in a hurry following a devastating sandstorm during which he's hit by flying debris and presumed dead. As the crew of the Ares 3 head for home and humanity comes to terms with the tragedy of another life lost in the name of space exploration, Mark Watney is far from dead. Gathering his wits he heads back to the team's habitation unit and sets about ensuring his own survival until the next manned mission to Mars in four years' time. He adapts and cannibalises his environment, plants potato crops in the dead Martian soil using his own waste as compost and spends his spare

time watching tapes of Happy Days and listening to one of his fellow crew members' unending supply of '70s disco classics.

The Martian is a breathtakingly bravura piece of filmmaking. Goddard has stripped away much of the book's occasionally dense (if commendably well-researched) scientific detail without losing the thrust of its importance; we're with Mark as he struggles to stay alive and the focus is squarely on his humanity, his humour and his extraordinary adaptability in the face of impossible adversity. The technical stuff - lighter and more readily-accessible than in the book - is subtly leavened by Mark's relentless optimism and his determination to survive in a situation almost too terrible to imagine.

Once we're used to seeing Mark - a brilliantly-nuanced everyman-in-space performance from the always-dependable Matt Damon - rising to the challenge of his situation, we come back down to Earth literally - as NASA Director Jeff Daniels and his crack team of solid supporting players (the brilliant Chiwetel Ejiofor, Kristin Wiig, Benedict Wong and Sean Bean) realise that Mark is alive and well and temporarily living on Mars. Their single-minded determination to find a way to bring their boy back is enough to restore anyone's wavering faith in the innate worthiness of humanity. A failed rescue attempt leads to a timely alliance with the Chinese space agency who might just possess the technology and the hardware necessary for the only audacious scheme - involving Jessica Chastain and her crew aboard Ares 3 as it powers its way back to Earth - which stands even the remotest chance of saving the beleaguered botanist.

Even if you've read Weir's novel, the

film's final act is almost unbearably exciting and whilst it skips some of the hardships Mark endures in the novel as he travels across the Martian surface, there's no let-up in the thrills and tension in a race-against-time climax which combines dazzling visuals and Scott's deft, immersive and yet never-intrusive or overly fussy direction. And this really is Scott's movie, reminding us what an extraordinary filmmaker he can be when he's working with sharp, intelligent raw material. Goddard's nifty script is witty when it needs to be (the shafts of humour are very much in the style of Joss Whedon, Goddard's old sparring partner on shows like *Buffy* and *Angel*) and never drifts into mawkish sentimentality, maintaining the steely matter-of-fact no-nonsense approach of Weir's often-wry novel.

The Martian ultimately exceeds every reasonable expectation of even the staunchest fan of the book who might have expected at least some disappointment from the film version. Incredible visual effects (the Martian landscape is filmed in Peru but you'd be forgiven for thinking it was actually shot on location on the red planet), stunning production design, an A-list cast giving it their all from beginning to end and a veteran director back at the top of his game; *The Martian* must be a contender for Film of the Year and is surely a shoo-in for a handful of Oscars at next year's ceremony. It's a must-see Martian masterpiece.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★★★ 10



LEGEND

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BRIAN HELGELAND / STARRING: TOM HARDY, CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON, TOM HARDY, EMILY BROWNING, COLIN MORGAN, TARA FITZGERALD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Man of the moment Tom Hardy, fresh from his triumphant turn as Max Rockatansky, delights his fans in the double role of the Kray Twins, but the film itself, however, has a few shortcomings.

The story of Reggie and Ronnie Kray is the UK's equivalent to the Capone/Mafia tale; a piece of folklore passed to each generation, with the nasty reality made more palatable with each re-telling.

And it certainly is the case with this latest version of the boys' lives. Narrated by Reggie's wife, Frances (Browning), this is less a gritty underworld story and more a series of not-quite-as-brutal-as-they-should-be events. Her besotted character is meant to be the audience's in to the world of the country's most notorious gangsters, but we can't help but feel she's on the road to ruin from the start, particularly as she attempts to steer Reggie

- portrayed as more business-minded and focused than his psychotic brother - on the straight and narrow, an act that seems as futile and ill-advised as stealing from them. Not to mention the anomaly of her accounts of events she would have obviously had no way of being privy to.

Where the film does shine is the loose cannon sibling Ronnie. Here, Hardy really acts. He embodies all the mannerisms and traits we would expect from seeing photos and footage of the real-life twins. A character whose personality could turn on a hairpin and does. It's a shame, then, that writer/director Helgeland doesn't go all out with the violence to show us how absolutely reprehensible these people were. At least it doesn't overlay the well they loved their mother angle like the earlier Kemp Brothers version. Indeed, mother here (played by Jane Wood) is a much more blinkered matriarch, turning a blind eye rather than encouraging the strength of the family.

Poor Christopher Eccleston doesn't fare well, either. His character, Detective Nipper

Read, a man who was driven to bring the twins to justice, is relegated to an also-ran role. His importance in their story should not be underestimated, as hinted at in the opening scenes in which the cocky Reggie chats to the frustrated copper on surveillance outside his home.

It's not all lost, though. *Legend* is visually stunning and possesses a feel for the period that instantly draws you in. It's not too flashy, but has enough flair to appeal to those brought up on Lock Stock rather than the crime dramas of the '60s and '70s. The narration actually gives it an almost noir-esque feel, which would have worked wonders had it been shot in black and white.

All in all, it's not quite a misfire, but could have been so much more. Hardy, however, will come out of it in higher esteem than ever as he cements himself as a true acting powerhouse.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

EXPECTED +++++ + + + + + 8

ACTUAL +++++ + + + + + 6



THE VISIT

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN / STARRING: OLIVIA DEJONGE, ED OXENBOULD, DEANNA DUNAGAN, PETER MCROBBIE, KATHRYN HAHN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After the back-to-back disappointments of *After Earth* and *The Last Airbender*, both commercially and critically, M. Night Shyamalan returns to his roots writing and directing this small-scale horror film that thankfully doesn't include him in the cast list.

Seeing an opportunity to give their mother some much-needed me time with her new boyfriend and for them to learn a bit about their family, teenagers Becca

(Olivia DeJonge) and Tyler (Ed Oxenbould) go and stay with their estranged grandparents for a week, grandparents who their mother (Kathryn Hahn) hasn't spoken to in 19 years. Of course, budding documentarian Becca brings along enough cameras to record this momentous occasion, whilst Tyler unfortunately brings his rap skills.

At first, "Nana" (Deanna Dunagan) and Pop-Pop (Peter McRobbie) seem straight out of a Frank Capra

movie; Nana constantly baking sweet things while Pop-Pop takes care of the land. It's not long, though, before Becca and Tyler start noticing that something's not quite right around the isolated farmhouse and start asking some questions. What are those strange noises in the house at night? What's hidden in the shed at the end of the yard? What's down in the basement that Tyler and Becca are not supposed to go in?

While most horror aficionados may guess what's going on before the rest of the audience, Shyamalan deftly plays tug-of-war with the audience's expectations, setting up strange behaviours by the grandparents that appear to have perfectly reasonable explanations when examined in the cold light of day and their advancing age. Overreactions to Becca's invasive interview techniques seem a lot less out of the ordinary when Becca herself doesn't react too well under similar, in-camera, questioning from her brother.

It may not be clear from the marketing but the whole film, with some very minor

exceptions, is shown only through the lenses of Becca's two cameras, but *The Visit* manages to avoid feeling like just another found footage movie. There are plenty of effective scares throughout, but the audience, like Becca and Tyler, are kept guessing as to their nature; are they supernatural in origin, is there a medical explanation or could there be something else going on?

Once the threat is finally revealed, some of the suspense is lost, but this doesn't quite take away from what has gone before. The blow is also softened considerably by the wicked sense of humour that runs throughout, although many may groan at Tyler's thankfully infrequent rapping.

The Visit is by no means a perfect horror film, but it does show that Shyamalan can still tell a scary story and tell it well. Hopefully he continues to do so and avoids the nonsensical twists and bloat that plagued his work after his initial success.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED ++++ + + + + + 4

ACTUAL +++++ + + + + + 8

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



COOTIES

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JONATHAN MILOTT, CARY MURNION / SCREENPLAY: LEIGH WHANNELL, IAN BRENNAN / STARRING: ELIJAH WOOD, ALISON PILL, RAINN WILSON, LEIGH WHANNELL, JACK MCBRAYER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For a while – maybe for its first thirty minutes or so – it really looks as if *Cooties* has nailed it. Comedy horror is a tough one to pull off, the problem often being that neither the comedy or the horror gets a fair crack of the whip and the audience is left with something which is neither one thing nor the other but an uneasy self-conscious amalgam of the two. *Cooties* robust, energetic first act suggests that here's another comedy horror – perhaps the first since the still-sublime *Shaun of the Dead* – which has hit the jackpot and found a way to consistently tickle the funny bone whilst sending the odd grim shiver up and down the spine. But then, disappointingly, it seems to run out of steam until it eventually runs aground.

It's a shame, because this is a great cast – Elijah (Wilfred) Wood alongside other US TV comedy favourites Rainn (The Office) Wilson and Jack (30 Rock) McBrayer – and a promising storyline. Wood plays would-be horror writer Clint Hadson, who turns up for work as a supply teacher in the elementary

school in his home town of Fort Chicken. The film's at its sharpest here; Clint's fellow teachers, including his ex-school squeeze Lucy (Alison Pill), are a fiercely quirky bunch and the dialogue and characterisation sings like the best US sitcoms. Meanwhile, school pupil Shelly has inadvertently eaten a chicken nugget infected with a gooey virus and by lunchbreak, she's running around the schoolyard biting chums and teachers alike and turning them into feral killing machines. Clint and co. eventually set aside their own insecurities and inadequacies and realise what's happening. They barricade themselves in the school as the zombified kids try to batter their way in.

This is where *Cooties* (it's a generic American term for an imaginary lurgi spread between young kids) starts to go off the boil. Once the virus takes hold, the story just drifts into typical zombie apocalypse territory, and while it's still patchily funny, it's suddenly more concerned with the fight for survival rather than focusing on

a group of misfits trading clever banter. Wilson steals the show as the swaggering PE teacher Wade, McBrayer is wasted as teacher Tracy Lacey, but Leigh (Insidious franchise) Whannell stands out and keeps the humour flag flying as socially inept Doug. There are a couple of good ideas thrown into the mix – the virus only infects the prepubescent – and the movie earns an extra mark or two – just for turning tiny kids into zombies and having the balls to kill them off in graphic fashion.

Cooties sets itself up for a sequel but in all honesty, we've probably seen the best of this one in its often laugh-out-loud first half-hour – watch out for a great Hobbit gag involving Wood. It's no comedy classic and it ultimately fails to fulfil its potential, but despite its shortcomings, *Cooties* is certainly worth catching.

Extras: *Elijah Wood interview*

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★ 6



JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS (2000)

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: NICK WILLING / SCREENPLAY: MATTHEW FAULK, MARK SKEET / STARRING: JASON LONDON, FRANK LANGELLA, DENNIS HOPPER, DEREK JACOBI, OLIVIA WILLIAMS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This feisty, lively mini-series, first screened in 2000 by the Hallmark Channel, has already seen the light of day on DVD in the UK back in 2004 but, like the legendary adventure it recounts, it happily bears and deserves another outing, because some stories really are absolutely timeless. Not to be confused with Don Chaffey's 1963 version, with its unforgettable Ray Harryhausen stop motion living skeletons and bronze giant, this is a more sprawling,

visually ambitious and rather loose retelling of one of the great Greek myths.

Originally entitled Jason and the Golden Fleece, the two-part TV movie (helpfully edited together for UK home consumption) tells the same basic story of the heroic Jason (Jason London), disenfranchised from his home when it is invaded by the evil Pelias (Dennis Hopper) who kills the King, his brother Aeson (Ciar n Hinds). Rescued from

certain death by one of his father's guards, Jason grows up in exile but returns to his home and is challenged by Pelias to find and bring back to him the magical Golden Fleece. Jason seeks out a mismatched group of shepherds, farmers and heroes to become the crew of his specially built vessel the Argos and together they set out across uncharted waters to find the Fleece. But their journey brings them into perilous contact with an assortment of terrifying creatures and sea monsters – and even mischievous Gods watching from high above – and perhaps even greater danger if they find the Fleece and bring it back to the devious Pelias.

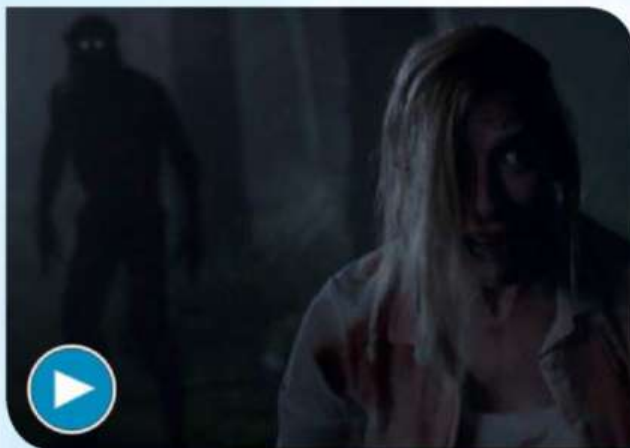
This version obviously isn't as memorable or iconic as the 1963 classic, but at times it's actually a pretty close thing. It's a spectacular, star-studded affair, a good old-fashioned fantasy adventure romp, which looks beautiful and is packed with thrilling action sequences and fantastic creatures, many of them realised with what might today be considered as fairly rudimentary CGI, but which still looks pretty effective. Almost as soon as the Argonauts set sail, they encounter the giant Sea God

Poseidon and later encounters with bat-like Harpies, Jason's battle with a mechanical bull and the appearance of the deadly man-eating dragon which guards the fleece certainly haven't been disgraced by the passage of time and the giant strides made in special effects technology since the film was made. Only an attempt to replicate Jason's fight with the dragon-tooth living skeletons disappoints and reveals the shortcomings of the available CG technology. They don't look much like skeletons and Jason avoids them by indulging in backflips, somersaults and an assortment of rather dull gymnastics.

Jason London is a decent, if bland, Jason but there's plenty of fun to be had star-spotting in the enormous supporting cast, with the likes of Adrian Lester, Omid Djalili, David Calder, Mark Lewis Jones and John Bennett cropping up in key roles. The tale of Jason and the Argonauts may have been better told before but this version is no disgrace and is rattlingly good family fun for a rainy Sunday afternoon.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



HOWL

DVD & BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: PAUL HYETT / SCREENPLAY: MARK HUCKERBY, NICK OSTLER / STARRING: ED SPELEERS, HOLLY WESTON, ELLIOT COWAN / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 26TH

Howl is a horror film that perfectly captures the terror of travelling on public transport, working on public transport and being murdered by werewolves on public transport. Train guard Joe (Speleers) is glum and disenfranchised, passed over

for promotion and ignored by the trolley dolly he fancies. The last thing he needs, then, is to be covering for a sick colleague and trapped on a train full of bickering passengers under attack from a vicious beast of the lycanthropic variety.

Confined to its singular location for almost the entirety of the film, Howl is a fast-paced and surprisingly brutal horror actioner; like Dog Soldiers crossed with the more recent (and similarly excellent) Brit flick Tower Block. The brief presence of Sean Pertwee strengthens the Dog Soldiers link, while Elliot Cowan plays the sort of malevolent asshole that would put Aliens Carter Burke to shame. The cast is rounded out by Shauna Macdonald, Amit Shah, Emmerdale's Duncan Preston (surprisingly good as the pensioner of the piece) and a number of other likeable, believable faces. The character work isn't exactly rounded, but it's good enough that you'll feel *something* whenever a character bites the dust.

If you're getting a Neil Marshall vibe from all of this, that's because director Paul Hyett has worked as a special effects technician on The Descent and Doomsday (plus, um, Centurion) in addition to many other British cult

favourites. Now that he's gotten the repulsive The Seasoning House out of his system, Howl marks him as a director to watch, particularly for his fantastically shot action sequences. While a little rough around the edges, the werewolf effects do the job, especially during one big action set-piece. If there's anyone who doesn't come out of it so well, it's love interest Holly Weston, who feels less like a character than a reward for Joe's emergent masculinity. She's the only one of the bunch who doesn't feel like a person in her own right – several times you'll forget she's even there – and it really hurts the film. When you remember, that is.

Such niggles aside, Howl is one of the best werewolf movies we've had in years. Action packed and full of fun, this gruesome creature feature shows that there's life in the old dog yet.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



V/H/S VIRAL

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: BLAIR REDFORD, CARRIE KEAGAN, MICHAEL FLORES / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 19TH

The popular found footage anthology series returns, lugging a packed case full of new directors and stories with it. As the subtitle suggests, V/H/S: Viral takes the franchise down a slightly different route, being concerned with the struggles of those who would be famous in

our modern age. Luckily, they all have mobile phones to record their every single movement, for better or worse.

For 'worse', see the film's wraparound tale, involving an ice cream van and a kidnapped girl. The incompetence carries on with the first segment – a

silly, barely found footage story about a magician and his magic cape. Stupid, lacking scares and tension and tonally at odds with the rest of the film (and series), Dante the Great (really) gets Viral off on the wrong footing, and it never recovers from there.

Which is a shame, because Nacho Vigalondo's *Parallel Monsters* is a great example of how clever and inventive the series can be when it tries, utilising the director's love of daft sci-fi and black comedy to great effect. To say anything beyond that would be to spoil its tricks, but suffice to say that it's by far the best thing about the film. The skateboarders-vs-cultists short *Bonestorm* isn't quite so clever, but it has good action, manic energy and reanimated skeletons something sorely lacking in horror films these days. Then it's onto the loud but uninteresting *Vicious Circles*, and the film ends as disappointingly as it started. Thanks to its dud elements, the disparate storylines fail to

gel as an entity, leaving Viral feeling too short and completely disconnected from its two predecessors.

To sum up, 2012's V/H/S was a well-presented but ultimately flawed portmanteau piece. Its sequel V/H/S 2 was a vast improvement, featuring a genuine masterpiece in Gareth Evans' *Safe Haven*. We had hoped that Viral would continue the upward curve in quality, but it's actually the worst yet. Both previous films' worst entries are far better than *Vicious Circles* and *Dante the Great*, while it leaves Vigalondo's work sadly lost among the mess. The atmosphere is almost gone and even the visual trickery seems more restrained than usual. Worst of all, it's completely lacking in scares. If the franchise wants to carry on, V/H/S really needs to find a good antivirus.

JOEL HARLEY



LET US PREY

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: BRIAN O MALLEY / SCREENPLAY: FIONA WATSON, DAVID CAIRNS / STARRING: LIAM CUNNINGHAM, POLLYANNA MCINTOSH, BRYAN LARKIN / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 19TH

Exiled to her backwater home town for an unspecified indiscretion, Police Constable Rachel Heggie is about to start her first shift with new colleagues, picking up a mouthy teenage joyrider before she's even made it to the station. However, after the arrival of an ominous man with no verifiable past who is placed in the cells along with the young criminal, a murderous doctor and a wife-beating teacher, things take a turn for the terrifying. It soon becomes clear that everyone is harbouring a dark secret and they are all about to descend into their own personal hell.

Although the plot of *Let Us*

Prey (not to mention its title) is reminiscent of any number of horror films you could call to memory with little effort, it's in the execution, rather than the set-up, that the movie excels.

Right from the doom-rock credit sequence of barbed wire dripping with fresh blood, squadrons of crows swarming in slow motion and darkened thunderclouds rolling overhead while a storm-tossed ocean lashes at coastal outcrops upon which a human silhouette stands defiant, it seems that subtlety is going to be in short order. However, despite being a sinister and bloody horror

movie with increasingly overt religious undertones, *Let Us Prey's* first-time feature director, Brian O Malley, also exercises a perfectly utilised level of restraint that prevents it from crossing the line into farce. That doesn't mean to say the film is without humour; the gobby bravado of the young ned is amusing, as is the occasional flash of self-awareness (What is it with this fucking town?), which prevents the film from becoming too bleak to be entertaining.

The small cast (eight characters of appropriately varied prominence) allows the events to remain tight and confined without becoming cluttered and the gradual reveal of the true extent of each person's wrongdoings keeps things interesting.

The central mystery of what's truly going on is anchored by the taciturn enigma of Liam Cunningham's nameless vagabond. He seemingly manipulates events from his cell via matchsticks used like eldritch marionette control bars while uttering cryptic pronouncements of doom that are thankfully devoid of the irritating sense of patronising condescension all too frequent in such dialogue. Although his precise nature is never specifically stated, it's clear he's a supernatural avenging force targeting those

who are so far beyond guilty they are now the irredeemable, the damned, the truly evil for whom salvation was a chance long since squandered. On the other end of the morality spectrum is Pollyanna McIntosh's Rachel, seemingly the only one without a violent past, but whose own buried secret goes a long way to explaining her icy exterior and disgust for violent sadists, while her height and leanly muscular frame allow her to convince as a natural action girl.

The setting is deliberately vague (the town of Inverree doesn't exist and the police officers' uniforms have no area designation), and as the desolate, decaying settlement seems utterly devoid of all other (living) people, it's entirely possible that they are all already in purgatory without realising it, with only the memories of their misdeeds to torment them as they await their sins to be counted out.

O Malley has marked himself as a talent to watch. Striking a perfect balance of suspense, violence, humour, story and action, *Let Us Prey* feels at once classic and modern; horror the way it was always supposed to have been made. You will not be disappointed.

ANDREW MARSHALL





MONSTER MADNESS □ MUTANTS, SPACE INVADERS AND DRIVE-INS

DVD / CERT: N/A / DIRECTOR: JEFF HERBERGER / SCREENPLAY: A. SUSAN SVEHLA / STARRING: VARIOUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Did you know that 1950's *Destination: Moon* was one of the first proper space-race science fiction films? Did you know that *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* taps into and allegorises America's McCarthy-era paranoia? Have you heard of Ed Wood, the famous cult bad movie director and that his *Plan Nine from Outer Space* is widely-regarded as one of the worst films ever made? Did you know that Americans

used to watch movies in outdoor drive-in theatres?

Of course you did. You're a STARBURST reader, this stuff is your bread-and-butter. The latest DVD documentary from Herberger (he's made a number of similar titles dealing with different eras and areas of genre history) is available to import should you so wish, but don't expect any startling revelations or extraordinary conclusions here. It's generally a fairly

bog-standard talking heads piece interlaced with clips from films we've all seen time and again (many of them absolute classics that never wear out their welcome, of course, as well as intriguing oddities like 1959's *The Hideous Sun Demon*). But what makes the piece worth consideration (apart from some cheesy, grainy footage from early 1950s US sci-fi TV hit *Space Patrol*) are some of the archive interviews with the likes of Samuel Z. Arkoff, Robert (The Day The Earth Stood Still) Wise, Anne (Forbidden Planet) Francis, and Famous Monsters legend Forrest J. Ackerman, as well as the cast of obscure B-movies such as *The Man From Planet X*. Many of these folk have long since gone to meet their maker, so *Monster Madness* offers the opportunity to see and hear their recollections of their moments in the sun, even if the film doesn't contextualise or explain the provenance of most of the footage – although it doesn't take a genius to realise much of it was filmed at small and long-forgotten gatherings of science fiction fans. It's a random and undisciplined wander through a very specific genre of filmmaking pulp monster movies, alien

invasion flicks – but there's some lovely stuff here from classics such as *The Thing From Another World* (the original and best), *Fiend Without A Face* (flying brains!) and the genuinely influential *Forbidden Planet* (Star Trek in all but name) and some interesting historical narrative about the rise and fall of the drive-in cinema phenomenon.

Monster Madness doesn't come to any conclusions about its subject matter as much as it just comes to a crashing and sudden end. But really, it's just a warm celebration of a much-loved era in genre filmmaking and it allows us to put faces to names we've seen on the credits of umpteen creaky black-and-white movies, many of which form the sturdy backbone of the genre which brings us all together. *Monster Madness* won't change your life or provide any deep new appreciation of its subject matter, but it's an inoffensive and lovingly-collected amble around very familiar territory. That's never a bad thing.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★ 6



DARK MATTER: SEASON ONE

DVD / CERT: 15 / CREATED BY: JOSEPH MALLOZZI, PAUL MULLIE / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / STARRING: MARC BENDAVID, MELISSA O NEIL, ANTHONY LEMKE, ALEX MALLARI JR., JODELLE FERLAND / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

What with all the superheroes/zombies flying/shuffling their way around our TV screens, there's not a lot of space sci-fi at the moment. Those missing the days of *Firefly* and *Battlestar Galactica* may want to check out *Dark Matter*, from Stargate writers Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie.

It's a neatly simple concept: six people wake up on a spaceship. They've all lost their memories and their

shoes. They find the shoes pretty quickly, and soon after discover that they're a mercenary crew composed of wanted criminals. Yet many secrets are left to be unveiled, not least who was behind the memory wipe.

These six characters name themselves after the order they emerged from stasis (One, Two, Three, etc – you've seen *Sesame Street*, you know how this works), which fits in nicely

with how they're basically a list of sci-fi clichés. There's the gun-toting, selfish tough guy, the quirky, vulnerable kid with genius computer skills, the silent Japanese warrior who's an expert at swordplay. It is nice, however, that it's a female character, Two, who ends up in charge of the gang and who often gets to kick ass and save the day.

As the series progresses, the team take various mercenary jobs (gotta pay the rent) in between following up leads related to their forgotten pasts. Like the characters, several plots lack originality – a derelict infected by a zombie virus, a spacewalk to repair the ship, a suspiciously helpful entertainment robot – and so this season, particularly in the first half, can feel like a slog. It doesn't help that the interaction between the team is terribly clunky – attempts at Joss Whedon-style wit fall flat 95% of the time, and the less said about the unbelievably cringeworthy romantic subplot the better.

But behind all the tropes, there is something interesting

fighting to get out, and *Dark Matter* improves towards the season's end, as darker secrets threaten to tear the team apart. The fact that one crew member wiped everyone's memory looms large, and just when you think you can trust someone, a new revelation makes you not so sure. The final episodes bring to the fore every underlying conflict, and *Dark Matter* becomes a *Reservoir Dogs*-esque edgy whodunit, in space. This is made more intriguing by their differing views on whether the crimes committed in their past lives should define who they are after the clean slate granted by their lost memory.

At its worst, *Dark Matter* is a clunky, unoriginal mess. At its best, it's a tense thriller of trust and deceit. If space sci-fi fans can put up with the bad bits, the good bits may just be good enough to fill up this gap in the market.

Extras: BTS Featurettes

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★ 5



CAPTAIN SCARLET: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (1967)

DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: FRANCIS MATTHEWS, ED BISHOP, DONALD GRAY, CY GRANT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Gerry Anderson's genuinely dark sci-fi series about an almost unstoppable alien invasion is frequently overlooked by fans. Everybody knows and adores Thunderbirds, but Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons combined Cold War paranoia and tense spy-fi action to create something rather unique.

In case the premise for this 48-year-old puppet show passed you by, here's a

summary: it is the year 2068 and Earth is protected by Spectrum, a colour-themed world security organisation which has a flying aircraft carrier known as Cloudbase as its base of operations and a team of decidedly international looking agents. After a diplomatic incident with the inhabitants of Mars, Earth ends up under threat by the seemingly invincible

Mysterons. Luckily, the same incident granted Spectrum agent Captain Scarlet near invulnerability. He must thwart the aliens at every turn, lest the Earth be destroyed.

We get all 32 episodes of the short-lived classic TV series. The tensions, drama and darkness are all still there; if the show scared the willies out of you when you were little, it should still give you a thrill today. The scariness of a bodyless alien foe that takes over living people is as creepy as ever. The acting is a little wooden, but then this is Supermarionation and so it's all done with dolls.

The quality of the print is good but it's nothing to write home about; it's of the quality we demand from modern DVD box sets, but nothing more. Same goes for the sound; the quality is acceptable but it's hardly going to stretch the capabilities of a modern TV and sound system. The menu for each episode is also quite crude. There's no play all button on each disc, and you have to click through to get each episode started. Part of the appeal of big

box sets like this is that you can start them and leave them on in the background, which you can't do here.

The DVD extras really aren't anything to write home about. We get some lovely vintage adverts for ice lollies and breakfast cereal, both of which are perfectly charming and serve to remind you exactly how old the show is. We also get an audio adventure, which is rather nice though pretty generic for what it is. Finally, we get some stills and some text telling us all about the TV21 comics, Cloudbase and Angel Interceptor. These would have worked well as short documentaries, but alas they're just text on screen, which you will almost certainly never read.

If you've already got this collection, then there is nothing new in the re-release to entice you, but if you're new to all things Captain Scarlet then you should investigate it today.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



ARROW: SEASON 3

DVD & BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: STEPHEN AMELL, EMILY BETT RICKARDS, DAVID RAMSEY, COLTON HAYNES, JOHN BARROWMAN, MATT NABLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second season of The CW's Arrow is right up there with the very best seasons of genre TV in recent memory. As such, following up such a much-heralded year of television was always going to be a tricky task. The big question, though, was whether Marc Guggenheim, Andrew Kreisberg, Greg Berlanti and co. could follow up the excellent Season 2 with an equally good third year.

As Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen again dons the famed green hood, a new big bad appears on the scene in the form of famed DC comic book villain Ra's al Ghul (Matt Nable). Seeing

Oliver as both a rival and a future heir, Ra's looks to get involved with the Emerald Archer in an attempt to force his hand and work alongside him. Added to this, a hard-hitting shocker of a conclusion to the first episode of Season 3 leads to a whodunit mystery that plays out through the majority of the season as familiar faces come and go and as we're introduced to new characters to both aid and go up against the Master Bowman and the rest of Team Arrow. Again utilising the approach of flashbacks, the show also takes us into the past of Oliver Queen, this time focusing on

Ollie's problems with Amanda Waller (Cynthia Addai-Robinson) and A.R.G.U.S. during his time in Hong Kong as a deadly virus begins to come into play.

Arrow has again delivered an enjoyable action ride of twists and turns, with its third season certainly not pulling any punches and featuring many shocking moments that will leave viewers jaws agape. Sure, it may not quite live up to the excellence of the previous season, but it still hits plenty of the right beats, not least in its action sequences and the performances of the majority of its key players. Star Stephen Amell is as comfortable in the skin of Oliver Queen and The Arrow as near-enough any live-action hero of recent memory, and he's helped out fantastically by the likes of David Ramsey's Diggle, Emily Bett Rickards' uber-cute Felicity Smoak, Colton Haynes' Roy Harper (himself now outright his own hero under the Arsenal moniker), and of course nefarious no-good sorts like Matt Nable's pitch-perfect Ra's al Ghul and John Barrowman's scenery-chewing Malcolm Merlyn. Still though, Katie Cassidy's Laurel Lance, despite taking steps towards becoming Black Canary, is all over the shop and often comes

off as thoroughly unlikeable and unrealistic in the scheme of all things Arrow.

Whilst still maintaining many of the facets that made its previous season so enjoyable, Arrow varies in tone during its third year. There are extremely dark moments (even if some of them may not stick quite as long as we'd have liked) yet the show also has moments of great hope and even suffers a mighty tonal shift by the time the season comes to a close.

Largely hitting the target, Season 3 of Arrow again delivers for one of the most popular genre shows out there at the moment. Our main gripe (bar the largely headache-inducing Laurel Lance) is that maybe some of the consequences of certain happenings could've been given more time to hit home, but all in all, fans of the show will find plenty to lap up in this new release.

Extras: Audio commentaries / Three featurettes / Arrow at Comic Con 2014 / Gag reel / Deleted scenes

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 7



THE MAN WHO COULD CHEAT DEATH (1959)

DVD & BD DUAL / CERT 12 / DIRECTOR: TERENCE FISHER / SCREENPLAY: JIMMY SANGSTER / STARRING: ANTON DIFFRING, HAZEL COURT, CHRISTOPHER LEE, ARNOLD MARL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Oooh! A new Hammer Blu-ray and a seldom seen one at that. From the late '50s heyday too. They'd done Frankie and Drac and were looking for some new material. What better idea than to effectively re-make a relatively obscure 1945 movie? (The Man in Half Moon Street, which was itself a sort of Dorian Gray-lite) While that might sound like a daft idea, when you think about it, it was actually right up Hammer's street: a genuinely Gothic story with not-quite-classic origins and a perfect excuse for a lurid climax with some form of disintegration. Blimey, that was a Hammer

speciality. Nothing could go wrong. Could it?

Georges Bonnet (Diffring) is a Paris-based sculptor with a secret. He's 104 years old but keeps himself youthful by replacing his parathyroid gland (or something) on a regular basis. Obviously this involves a bit of fog-bound street murder and, if it's not going to plan, he keeps himself going with glasses of green bubbly stuff. But he also needs someone to perform the operation and his old mucker (Marle) is understandably getting a bit too dodgy to be doing that sort of thing as he's nearly as

old as Georges but never did the gland thing. So he needs to get another surgeon (Lee) to do it but it's a bit awkward as a) he doesn't want to and b) he's a rival for the affections of the beautiful Janine (Court). Did we mention Georges was a bit of a ladies' man? Well he's had enough practice, so unsurprisingly really.

With Big Chris and the original Hammer girl herself on board, you'd think this was surefire stuff. It's even Sangster and Fisher on writing and directing duties. While not every Hammer was a zinger, it was only when they were doing (yet) another Drac or Frankie that they might just go through the motions. New material usually kept it interesting. Check out The Gorgon (1964) or The Reptile (1966) for Hammer at its most enthusiastic. But here we seem to be lacking something. Diffring is a dull lead in this role and the cast just doesn't seem to gel. There should be sparks when he's up against Chris but they just look like they're bored at a time when Hammer horror was still new. No Michael Ripper either.

But it's not a total disaster. Things do pick up towards the

end and there is at least some chemistry between Big Chris and the nearly-as-big Francis de Wolff as the police inspector puzzling over the fact that his chief suspect in a series of murders would have to be a centenarian to have carried them all out. The climax is actually top Hammer stuff with an inevitable disintegration of apocalyptic quality. They were always good at those. Chuck in Hazel Court looking stunning (fantastic outfit in the final section) and you've got something watchable if disappointing for those of us who love a Hammer. Oh, and the continental release of this apparently featured Hazel topless when she poses for Georges' sculpture. We never got that version so here it's one of the disc's extras. [Really?! Ed] No, I made that up. It's lost. [Awww... Ed]

Extras: Interviews with Kim Newman and Jonathan Rigby, booklet and absolutely no deleted scenes of Hazel Court. Sorry.

JOHN KNOTT

★★★★★★ 6



STUNG

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: BENNI DIEZ / SCREENPLAY: ADAM ARESTY / STARRING: JESSICA COOK, LANCE HENRIKSEN, MATT O'LEARY, CLIFTON COLLINS JR., TONY DE MAEYER / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 26TH

It would be very easy to be sniffy about Benni Diez's debut feature, *Stung*. An isolated stately home under attack by giant wasps who have mutated due to fertiliser being mixed with growth hormones as a premise might sound like the worst form of monster movie schlock you've ever heard of. But wind your genre tastes back a few years and this was the sort of film you'd hope to discover while channel-hopping on a Friday night; a credible return to the nostalgia of *Them!* or the darkly comic fun of *Eight Legged Freaks*. *Stung* isn't entirely

successful in filling that gap, but it has a damn good try.

Julia (Jessica Cook) runs a business organising parties (because, you know, she likes to party, so...) and her next job is to provide the catering and entertainment for a fancy soirée in the garden of a country estate. Her unenthusiastic assistant/lackey Paul (Matt O'Leary), who has barely concealed romantic ideals on Julia, is soon the least of her worries as killer wasps begin emerging from a hole in the ground and proceed to parasitically impregnate all the guests.

Most of the enjoyment to be found in *Stung* stems from the use of practical effects. Apart from some necessary CGI - for instance, when the winged baddies take to the air - the majority of the encounters involve animatronic heads and appendages, with plenty of blood thrown in for colour. While effective in creating a sense of realism (yes, we know it's still giant wasps) and avoiding unconvincing CGI that frequents so many low budget films, it does give the confrontations a languid feel and lessens the tension somewhat. The wasps also look distinctly alien rather than terrestrial, with more than a passing resemblance to H. R. Giger's most famous creation. These are harsh criticisms, though, and ones that the film generally overcomes through a likeable cheesy sensibility and a refusal to take itself too seriously. The fact that some of the beasties that emerge from the guests still have their host's torn faces adorning their bodies is both a gory and humorous touch.

So far as the performances

go, they are as you would expect from a film of this type. O'Leary is fun as the slacker Paul who discovers his inner hero and (hardly a spoiler) gets the girl in the end; quite literally. Lance Henriksen adds some genre weight as the local mayor more interested in the wine vintage and re-election than the bug problem at hand, and Clifton Collins Jr. has great fun as the weird son of the homeowner who was always going to come to a sticky end.

Stung is nothing more, nothing less than you would hope it to be. It is a fun monster movie that hits all the most familiar genre beats and, while being thoroughly enjoyable throughout its fairly short running time, will not live too long in the memory. This is a film that will quickly find a home on some late night channel as a suitable double-bill companion to another giant insect instalment. Enjoy with beer and friends.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★ 5



THE CANAL

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: IVAN KAVANAGH / STARRING: RUPERT EVANS, HANNAH HOEKSTRA, STEVE ORAM, ANTONIA CAMPBELL-HUGHES, KELLY BYRNE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ivan Kavanagh's grim and stylish horror thriller, *The Canal*, cleverly manages to subvert traditional genre tropes to leave its audience guessing throughout as to the true nature of the film. After becoming suspicious his wife Alice (Hannah Hoekstra) is having an affair, David (Rupert Evans) follows her, only to discover he's correct. Heading home distraught, he suffers what he believes to be a ghostly experience, and when Alice

is found dead in the canal, he begins to believe a malevolent spirit is responsible and is now haunting him.

What begins as a fairly formulaic whodunit chiller slowly descends into a nightmarish mixture of reality and fantasy that reflects Paul's own fragile psychological state. As he becomes more and more convinced, and obsessed, that his home is haunted by the spirits of a serial killer, he

alienates anyone close to him and arouses the suspicions of Detective McNamara (Steve Oram). The central performance is both pitiful and desperate, with Evans thoroughly convincing as the slightly pathetic Paul who never seems fully comfortable in his skin even before his wife's death. Put-upon and considered weak by anyone who seems to come into contact with him, it is hard to fully empathise as you are never completely certain of the true nature of Alice's disappearance.

The film's focus on Paul is both its strength and its main weakness. Despite the lack of empathy generated, it is an engaging performance, but, apart from the underused Oram, the rest of the cast are little more than background clichés and as such are almost inconsequential. Kelly Byrne does the best she can with the frightened nanny role that requires little more than some frightened screaming, and Hoekstra's Alice looks guilty of infidelity from the moment we are introduced to her. This inconsistency unbalances

the film somewhat, but the oppressive tone is constant, aided by a colour palette that is striking in being almost monochrome. There is also a question over the route that the main plot takes once more of the mystery is revealed. Equally, the final scenes feel a little neat, as if decided more by necessity than preference, with the film becoming a little predictable in the final stages. That said, there is a terrifically dark sting in the tale.

The Canal is a rare thing, though; it is a film that possesses the ability to both frighten and disturb its audience, with any violence and horror being both unexpected and gloriously macabre. Kavanagh's film takes a premise similar to that of *Sinister* and strips it back to basics, draining it of any Hollywood grandeur, and the result is a film that is intense and frightening without seeming to try too hard.

JOHN TOWNSEND



EATEN ALIVE (1977)

DVD & BD DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: TOBE HOOPER / SCREENPLAY: KIM HENKEL / STARRING: NEVILLE BRAND, MEL FERRER, CAROLYN JONES, ROBERTA COLLINS, MARILYN BURNS, ROBERT ENGLUND / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Eaten Alive, also known in the UK as *Death Trap*, was Tobe Hooper's first effort after the iconic and game-changing *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). To put it frankly, *Eaten Alive* is an archetypal exploitation film, and it slots in with the prominent wave of exploitative gore films from the 1970s. Pretty much all the death in the film seems gratuitous and it comes as no surprise that the film was banned as part of the 'video nasties' fiasco.

The film's opening screams B-MOVIE! loudly in your face as we see genre icon Robert

Englund attempting to get a little too frisky with a young prostitute named Clara (Collins). She escapes his prying hands and flees to the dilapidated local Starlight Hotel that is owned and operated by an unsettling man named Judd (Brand). Now, *The Starlight Hotel* isn't your run-of-the-mill establishment. For starters, Judd keeps a pet alligator (or is it a crocodile? It's referred to as both in the film) outside. To add to this peculiar pet choice, Judd himself is suggested to be suffering from post-traumatic stress and is evidently missing

a few proverbial screws. In short, this results in him being less than courteous to his patrons. This aspect of the narrative, combined with Brand's performance as the visibly unstable Judd, is one of the saving graces of the plot, because if you grasp at straws enough, it could be suggested that there is a subtle cultural context to justify the madness.

The plot is pretty much what you'd expect from a horror film that involves a disturbed hotel worker who keeps an alligator for a pet. Lots of people get killed and/or eaten. If we were reviewing the hotel on TripAdvisor, we'd probably only give it two stars and that's because it'd be kind of cool to have a gator swimming around outside. Minus the maiming, of course.

In the new, albeit brief introduction to this Blu-ray release, Tobe Hooper says *hope you like the colours*. It sort of speaks volumes that this is one of the only things he has to say about the picture. To be fair to Tobe though, it is actually visually interesting. The film was shot entirely on a sound stage (the same used in 1950 for *Sunset Boulevard*) and has a constrictive, claustrophobic feel that complements the

Deep South Louisiana narrative setting. The most alluring aspect of the *mise-en-scène* is the expressionistic crimson lighting that is cast upon the hotel. In the special features interview, Tobe states he wanted to evoke the feeling of a surrealistic, twilight world and in this he succeeds. A hotel run by a psychotic owner, with a flesh-eating gator outside, cast in an ominous red light, is pretty bloody surreal. Ultimately though, it isn't quite enough.

If you know Tobe Hooper for his genre classics *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Poltergeist* (1982), then unfortunately you might be a little disheartened by his second feature. *Eaten Alive* is kind of like opening an awaited Christmas present that actually turns out to be socks. You can appreciate that at some point you might wear them, but did you really want them?

Extras: Interviews (new and archive) / *The Butcher of Elmendorf* (Feature Documentary) / Theatrical Trailers / TV & Radio Spots / Alternate Credits / Galleries / Audio Commentary

FORD MADDOX BROWN





WILFRED □ THE COMPLETE SERIES (US)

DVD / CERT: 15 / CREATOR: JASON GANN, DAVID ZUCKERMAN, ADAM ZWAR
/ DIRECTOR: RANDALL EINHORN, VICTOR NELLI JR. / STARRING: ELIJAH
WOOD, JASON GANN, FIONA GUBELMANN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The concept of Wilfred - a man who sees his neighbour's pet as a man dressed as a dog - is easily dismissed thanks to the pure zaniness of the idea, but behind Wilfred's crazy premise lies a surprisingly ingenious exploration of self with a whole lot of comedy to boot. Featuring some of American comedy's best writers, including David Zuckerman of Family Guy fame, Wilfred tows the line between high-brow laughs and gross-out gags, making for an enjoyable viewing no matter what your taste.

With cameos from some of Hollywood's comic heroes, including a handful of stars from The Office (U.S.), as well as the late and great Robin Williams, Wilfred sets a high standard of comedy that's rarely seen nowadays.

Wilfred follows the friendship and adventures of Ryan (Elijah Wood) and his neighbour Jenna's dog (or should that be dog-man?), played by Jason Gann. Wilfred is a devious and cunning character with charm and wit, but unlike the typical man's-best-friend,

Wilfred's purposeful lies and manipulations often get Ryan into troubling and sometimes shocking misadventures. Despite showing up when Ryan's perpetual loneliness ended in an attempted suicide, it's difficult to know who Wilfred really cares for himself or Ryan.

The friendship between Wilfred and Ryan isn't just a funny one, it's surprisingly heart-warming as well. Through Wilfred's plots and schemes - including breaking into his neighbour's house to steal his weed plants - Ryan is able to embrace life, grow socially and learn to love himself despite his flaws. It's easy to hate Wilfred at times, and it's also easy to fear him, but this mistrust is well-balanced with the joy his friendship brings to Ryan, and of course, those all-important hilarious doggy moments.

Over its four seasons, Wilfred paints a picture of Ryan's life wherein the people he isolates himself from - the desirable girl next door, his moody and overbearing sister, the father who led Ryan to his suicide attempt, and the mother locked away in a sanatorium - all become relationships that are fully attainable thanks to the efforts and teachings of Wilfred. The depth and ingenuity of the show overtake the silliness

of Wilfred being a man in a dog costume, and the concept not only becomes entirely believable, but almost normal. The question of who - or what - Wilfred really is, is one that runs throughout the series, but although it might seem like a prevalent or important question, it's simplistic answer transforms the show from light-hearted entertainment into something much more ground-breaking.

A guiding spirit, a weed-smoking dog or a manifestation of Ryan's unhappiness - whatever Wilfred might be, his history and the growing relationship between Ryan and himself make him an undeniably fantastical character, whatever his origins are. A heartfelt ride through mental illness, loneliness, love, family and acceptance, Wilfred is a must-see comedy that delivers nothing less than excellence. Featuring a decent amount of special features, including bloopers, deleted scenes and an exclusive short, this is a boxset that belongs on every shelf.

Extras: Four featurettes / Stay exclusive short / Bloopers reel / Deleted scenes

LARA BROWN



NARCOPOLIS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JUSTIN TREFGARNE / STARRING:
ELLIOT COWAN, ELODIE YUNG, JONATHAN PRYCE, ROBERT BATHURST,
HARRY LLOYD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The near future, England: Frank Grieves is a new kind of cop - a Dreck - dedicated to keeping black market drugs off the streets while the licensed companies and dealers at legal high company Ambro get ever richer and

more powerful. When Grieves stumbles across a strange new substance in an unidentified body, it becomes evident that a vast conspiracy is afoot.

An ambitious one, this, with shades of Looper and Repo Men to its grimy, plausible future.

Elliot Cowan is well-cast as Grieves, our viewer identification figure in a world where drugs are (sort of) legal and dealers knock door-to-door in silly white hats giving free lollipops to kids. He's propped up by the likes of Jonathan Bathurst and Harry Lloyd, providing a British stiff upper lip contrast to the slums and druggies. Grieves is normally surrounded by. Best of all, there's Jonathan Pryce in a small but pivotal role, stealing the show whenever he appears. Keep an eye out for Battlestar Galactica's Gaius Baltar too; for a relatively low-budget sci-fi, Narcopolis is remarkably well acted and cast.

Its sense of ambition also extends to the story and writing. Starting off with a strong concept - murder mystery in a future where drugs are legal - it goes to some admirably ambitious places from there (spoiler territory abounds). There isn't the budget for fancy

effects or CGI, but it's supported by the visuals and action, all combining to make a well-realised, plausible and exciting world that Narcopolis does a great job of exploring.

Budget Brit sci-fi with a brain, Narcopolis will leave viewers buzzing, dazed and desperately jonesing for the next hit.

JOEL HARLEY





THE ELIMINATION GAME

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JON HEWITT / SCREENPLAY: JON HEWITT, BELINDA MCCLORY / STARRING: DOMINIC PURCELL, VIVA BIANCA, ROBERT TAYLOR, NICHOLAS HAMMOND / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

(Please don't) stop me if you think you've heard this one before. A former government operative locked away for a massacre he didn't commit is taken out of prison and thrown into a reality TV show, in which he must battle a series of themed killers in order to win his freedom. Yes, that's the plot of Arnold Schwarzenegger's cheesy 1987 actioner *The Running Man*. It's also the plot of *The Elimination Game*

(titled *Turkey Shoot* elsewhere, presumably changed here in the hope that someone will think it's a sequel to *The Imitation Game* – I'd love to see their reaction).

But there's nothing inherently wrong in re-using stories, right? We've been recycling and adapting narratives since ancient civilisations first borrowed bits of each other's myths. The thing is, *The Running Man* had

things to recommend about it – not least that it was ahead of its time. In a world where *The Hunger Games* has the dystopian reality telly thing covered (and has it covered rather well), this whole concept, particularly when nothing new is added to it, feels sadly old-hat.

Nor does *The Elimination Game* do a good job with this story. In Dominic Purcell, it's found a star somehow less emotive than Arnie (he narrows his eyes at one point – that's the extent of his acting) and without the cult appeal. The action sequences are unengaging, largely because Purcell's Rick Tyler seems to put in little to no effort. The odds should be stacked against him, but he never takes a scratch and always seems to have the racial stereotype of the day lying dead before you realise the fight's begun. At one point, an enemy faces him, raises her guns, and is immediately blown up by friendly fire. Scene over. Yawn.

Making this worse is the fact that director Jon Hewitt and his writing partner Belinda

McClory seem uninterested in exploring Rick as a character with his backstory needlessly held back for a predictable (and yet totally unbelievable) twist, we're given no reason to care whether it's him or his opponents who inevitably end up dead. The non-stop use of CCTV, news footage, and incredibly annoying presenters is also a problem – it alienates us from him as a character (at one point, the film cuts to a news report mere seconds into a car chase scene), making the act of following Rick's journey as empty as if we actually were watching this reality TV show.

The Elimination Game takes a story that has been told before and tells it again, badly. With a character-less lead character, action-less action scenes, and nothing creative to add to the genre, it's a difficult one to recommend.

Extras: Trailer

KIERON MOORE

+++++ 1



THE ENFIELD HAUNTING

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KRISTOFFER NYHOLM / SCREENPLAY: GUY LYON PLAYFAIR, JOSHUA ST JOHNSTON / STARRING: TIMOTHY SPALL, MATTHEW MACFADYEN, ELEANOR WORTHINGTON-COX / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 19TH

Let's be clear: whether you believe the events depicted in *The Enfield Haunting* to be real or not has no bearing. What actually matters is whether or not this drama from Kristoffer Nyholm, the acclaimed director of Danish police procedural show *The Killing*, is actually any good. And it happens to be very good indeed.

Based on the book by Guy Lyon Playfair (here played with wit and caddish charm

by Macfadyen), this three-part series tells the amazing story of what supposedly happened to an average family in Enfield, London over a period of time beginning in August 1977. When two teenage girls, Janet (Eleanor Worthington-Cox) and Margaret (Fern Deacon), fall victim to an aggressive spirit, Maurice Grosse (Timothy Spall), an inventor with an interest in the paranormal, is sent to investigate. Assisted by Playfair,

the pair become convinced of the authenticity of the girl's claims despite pressure to the contrary from the Society for Psychical Research.

The strengths of *The Enfield Haunting* stem primarily from its simplicity. This is a series focussing on the characters at the centre of the haunting rather than on the haunting itself. Of course, the poltergeist is important but it is how the family and those around them behave that is most interesting. Initial terror gives way to a reluctant acceptance as what first seems extraordinary becomes wearily routine for the beleaguered family. The comings and goings of various experts (although notably not The Warrens, who will tackle their version of this story in the sequel to *The Conjuring*) offer a balanced view on the tale, with Nyholm preferring to leave the audience to decide for themselves on the true validity.

The performances throughout are exemplary, with Worthington-Cox as primary victim Janet worthy of note. Her at times uncomfortable relationship with Spall's Grosse (think Mr. Turner with less grunting and a few

smiles) provides the emotional centre of the piece; a father-daughter understanding that they both desperately need.

With little fuss and few unnecessary histrionics, *The Enfield Haunting* does exactly what it sets out to do. There are occasional jump scares and moments of horror cliché scattered through the episodes, but these serve to advance the narrative rather than be there simply to frighten the audience. There is real subtlety here, with discomfort and fear generated through your engagement with the characters rather than by loud bangs and crashes.

Intentionally slow paced at times, *The Enfield Haunting* is an intensely impressive depiction of a family haunted by a malevolent spirit. It should serve as a template for what can be achieved without the need for excessive, improbable effects and is one of the best horrors you will watch this year. Whatever you believe, Nyholm's version is certainly credible and one that will leave you wondering.

JOHN TOWNSEND

+++++ 8

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES

AUDIOSTATIC



THE WAR DOCTOR

Big Finish will be releasing a series of stories starring John Hurt as **The War Doctor**, the secret regeneration of everyone's favourite Time Lord introduced for the fiftieth anniversary special in 2012. Twelve audio dramas will be released over four box sets, with the first being released in December, followed by the second in February 2016. Former **Blake's 7** star Jacqueline Pearce joins Hurt as a fellow Time Lord Cardinal Ollistra fighting the Time War against the Daleks. A prequel box set of stories entitled **Doctor Who: The Eighth Doctor The Time War** will portray the early days of the Time War from Paul McGann's incarnation's perspective is set for a November 2017 release.

BBC Halloween

We start with news of two treats for Halloween from the BBC. As midnight approaches, listeners to Radio 4 can tune into both Nigel Kneale's **The Stone Tape** (at 22:00) followed by Koji Suzuki's **Ring** (at 23:00). Suzuki's novel was turned into a film in 1998, and notably remade by Hollywood in the 2002 film **The Ring**. This audio version includes Eve Myles and Naoko Mori (**Torchwood**) along with Akira Koieyama (**Rush**) and Matthew Gravelle (**Broadchurch**).

Nigel Kneale is best known for being the creator of the seminal British TV series **Quatermass** and **The Stone Tape** was first broadcast as a 90-minute TV drama on Christmas Day, 1970 starring Jane Asher and Iain Cuthbertson among others. This new radio version's stars include Julian Rhind-Tutt (**Lucy, Rush, Vince Cosmos**), Romola Garai (**Atonement, The Hour**) and Julian Barratt (**The Mighty Boosh**). Set in an allegedly haunted Victorian house, it centres on a group of scientists investigating the supernatural and in many ways was an influence on the **Doctor Who** story **Hide**.

ROBIN OF SHERWOOD

Bafflegab Productions (**Scarifiers, Vince Cosmos, Brenda and Effie**) launched a crowdfunding campaign on September 15th and made their first target within one day! All profits above production costs are going to charity so there is no reason not to add your support. The project will re-unite the cast of the TV series **Robin of Sherwood** in a one-off story written by show creator Richard Carpenter (aka Kip). Phil Rose (Friar Tuck) was thrilled: *I'm so pleased that this project has brought together the cast, Kip's original script, and also the fans that have made this possible and have waited so long for this. They have not waited in vain!* With the initial funding assured, producer Simon Barnard is adding to the possible rewards for funders with the announcement of a novelisation by Paul Magrs. If you want to know more, visit www.robin-of-sherwood.co.uk.

THE LIGHT OF SEPTEMBER

There was a late-September launch for the latest project from Radio Static, the creative powerhouse behind the award-winning **The Minister of Chance**. Their new series will be called **The**

Light of September and stars Sylvester McCoy, Tamsin Greig and Thorbjørn Harr and is written and directed by Dan Freeman. The premise is straightforward: *Nothing can travel faster than light. In the near future, however, it does, and the crew of the RRS Venus must deal with the Earth-shattering consequences.*

You can find more details at www.radiostatic.co.uk.

BIG FINISH

Finally, back to Big Finish for a quick wrap-up of some of their recent announcements. Full details of all titles in the first series of **Torchwood** releases have been released – we now know the various titles will feature Captain Jack, Ianto Jones, Gwen Cooper and Rhys Williams (aka John Barrowman, Gareth David-Lloyd, Eve Myles and Kai Owen). The surprise announcement was that Tracy-Ann Oberman is reprising her role as Yvonne Hartman, last seen converted to a Cyberman in the battle of Canary Wharf in **Doctor Who** (this story is set before!). In effect this is now another Big Finish use of new-**Who** characters.

Further adventures for **Jago & Litefoot** in 2016 (originally seen in **The Talons of Weng-Chiang**, this will be their eleventh boxset and they have made other appearances in various special releases). **Counter-Measures** will also return. September ended with the release of details for the new series of **The Prisoner** – look out for more on that soon.

**BIG
FINISH**

WE LOVE
STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE EARLY ADVENTURES 2.02 THE FORSAKEN

Another fantastic story from the Second Doctor's tenure in which the TARDIS materialises in Singapore at the height of the Japanese invasion. However, it's not just the armies they should be worried about.

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 31st

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DARK SHADOWS: 50 AND RED ALL OVER

More macabre soap opera from the Gothic pile of Collinwood, where newlywed Maggie Haskell faces a unholy decision when she's held captive in a cabin in the woods.

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 31st

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DOCTOR WHO: DOOM COALITION SERIES 1

Paul McGann's incarnation of the Time Lord (the eighth) makes a welcome return with this follow-up to the Dark Eyes series. A four-part story involving rampaging aliens and deadly secrets, expect nothing but excitement!

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 31st

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JAGO & LITEFOOT: SERIES 10

The ever-popular characters from the classic 1977 serial **The Talons of Weng-Chiang** return for their tenth adventure investigating the strange and mysterious. Guest stars include Toby Hadoke and David Warner.

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 31st

To order, or for more information, head over to bigfinish.com

REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



STREETS OF RAGE (1991)

COMPOSER: YUZO KOSHIRO / LABEL: DATA DISCS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Data Discs' release of Yuzo Koshiro's soundtrack to the 1991 Sega game *Streets of Rage* is just excellent. From audio quality to packaging, it is an overall gem of a soundtrack release. The LP as a whole is a little tinny on the high end, but that's sort of the nature of the early

video game music. The high end is always a little warbly and high-pitched, but it's completely counterbalanced in the way the low end thumps, which makes for a surprisingly funky listen.

Coming as it does from purely digital files to an analog format, the music gains a bit of warmth and oomph in the translation between formats. The remastering for vinyl allows Koshiro's music to breathe, whereas the original pieces of music within the game were, obviously, compressed a bit.

The intro to *The Street of Rage* sounds akin to Enigma's *Sadness*, then goes into an absolutely danceable gem of a beat. *Attack the Barbarian* is pure hardcore dancefloor bliss. It's all bass and electronic shouts, with only the slightest of flourishes to lend it some flavour. The island touch to *Keep the Groovin'* lends itself to a samba.

The Bollywood touch to *Beatnik on the Ship* continues the variety, allowing for *Streets of Rage* to show off a diverse array of styles. Thankfully, the limited range of sounds the equipment Koshiro utilised keeps the pallet of sounds to a minimum, meaning that even as the composer experiments with rhythmic patterns and

compositional techniques, he's still creating a soundtrack which has an overriding sense of togetherness.

The sequencing is rather clever, too. Ending side A with *Round Clear* is almost too precious, but provides a smart reminder that it's time to flip the record. The same goes with ending side B with *naturally Game Over*. Bravo to Data Discs for locking the final groove, as well. It might be the first time we've frantically started pushing buttons to continue while listening to an LP.

The vinyl's gorgeously heavyweight, and the red vinyl matches the prevalent cover colours perfectly. The art prints that come with the release are exactly the sort of thing a video game junkie would love to have hanging in their home. They're classy, but not too classy. We'd have killed for some form of liner notes, though. The label worked with Koshiro to remaster everything, and a paragraph or two about the 25-year history of this music, or even just his process composing, would have really rounded out the package.

NICK SPACEK



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COOTIES

COMPOSER: KRENG / LABEL: MILAN RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The first half of Kreng's score for the infected children movie *Cooties* is an absolute dream of weirdness. The Opening Titles soundtrack the voyage of a chicken nugget in the film, but on its own, the melding of Omen-like chanting with toy piano, then layering in a kazoo orchestra, is both delightful and terrifying.

The first few cuts which follow the opening titles are echo-y exercises in drums and atmosphere. The electronic distortion starts to amp up as the score progresses, making its first appearance in *Dink Spreads the Virus*. The Omen chorus returns in *Mr. Simms Attacked*, along with some really dissonant violins which start to take the score from ominous foreshadowing of doom to actively participating in the onscreen destruction.

The Playground is an absolute masterpiece of a trippy, uncomfortable soundscape. It brings to mind a lot of the great instrumental hip hop cuts of the last decade, sounding a lot like *The Avalanches* or *Clutchy Hopkins*, utilising as it does that spare, far away piano and the scattered, skittering beats.

Trike Girl bases itself around a music box version of *All Around the Mulberry Bush*, and the sound of a Jack in the Box hasn't been this terrifying since *Poltergeist*. It's also the last of the creepy, atmospheric stuff until nearly the end of the score. For the back half of the film and the score, the music is all bombastic electronic sprites and tribal drums. It stops being horror and turns into action/adventure, and while sonically well executed, it's not really this reviewer's

cup of tea. Bifurcating the album into the more experimental first half and the rather more usual second means that *Cooties*' score isn't going to get a lot of full play-throughs.

Dink's Death is the rare cut that leans into the action vibe which manages to avoid sounding clichéd. It helps that Kreng lays pretty heavily on the pitch-shifting for its duration, lending it a sense of disorientation. *Carnival* does a solid job combining the earlier found-sound aesthetic of *Trike Girl* with the blasting weirdness of *Dink's Death*, while not falling into the standard 'pounding drums with squidgy bleeps' minefield.

It's strange: when you watch the film, it takes a bit to get going, then really peaks in the middle, before kind of piddling out into a series of clichés at the end. The score starts out strong, then troughs a bit in the middle, before recovering near the end with *Wandering in the Dark* and *Carnival*. However, much like the film, the score has enough moments of cleverness and brilliance to balance out its excursions into stock concepts.

NICK SPACEK



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**PATHFINDER LEGENDS:
- MUMMY'S MASK:
THE HALF-DEAD CITY**

AUTHOR: CAVAN SCOTT / **DIRECTOR:** JOHN AINSWORTH / **STARRING:** STEWART ALEXANDER, TREVOR LITLEDALE, IAN BROOKER, KERRY SKINNER / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH, PAIZO / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Pathfinder is a fantasy franchise that seems to set take over the world. It started out as an alternative to Dungeons & Dragons, but has since developed into its own thing. Its heritage is still obvious to see when you look closely; Pathfinder products tend to involve ensemble casts and be heavy on exposition, almost as if they're designed with small groups of role-players in mind.

These geeky origins are all the more obvious in the Big Finish audio drama, *Mummy's Mask: The Half-Dead City*. The ancient Necropolis of Wati has been opened for exploration, and adventurers from across the land have come to plunder this city of the dead. Of

course, the place is filled with zombies, ghouls, ghosts and other horrible things, but it's also packed with treasure and artefacts that have not been seen for millennia. The drama focuses on two adventuring groups, one of which is clearly meant to be a proxy for the listener, and then the other team, The Scorched Hand, is a more sinister group who have their own reasons for tomb raiding.

The audio drama is adapted not from a short story but a role-playing game scenario, and this becomes quickly obvious. It works surprisingly well as an audio, however; the banter between the heroes is thick and fast and the acting is

solid throughout. The plot is steady and entertaining all the way through and it's pretty easy for the listener to pick up this fantasy world.

Mummy's Mask: The Half-Dead City is flat-out swords and sorcery fun. Some of the elements owe a bit more to the gaming clichés than they perhaps should, and story elements intended to create a broader arc plot feel a little forced (and mostly irrelevant), but overall this is a solid listen and should keep you happily entertained for a couple of hours.

ED FORTUNE



**DARK SHADOWS:
TAINTED LOVE**

AUTHOR: DANIEL COLLARD / **DIRECTOR:** JOSEPH LIDSTER / **STARRING:** KATHLEEN CODY, ALEC NEWMAN, STEPHANIE ELLYNE, DANIEL COLLARD / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Dark Shadows began life as an American daytime TV drama

series. This regular show featured supernatural elements such as vampires, ghosts, demons and witchcraft, set in the remote town of Collinsport, a town controlled by the Collins family. It was cancelled in the '70s, but like the vampires it features, it keeps coming back from the dead.

Dark Shadows: Tainted Love is a Big Finish audio drama that returns us to this cult TV series. Big Finish are the go-to team to bring a well-loved TV series back to life, after all. The plot is appropriately soap opera-based. David Collins has taken control of the town's factory and his friend Amy Jennings (now Amy Cunningham) is on hand to help him out and provide moral support. Both are recovering from the horrifying supernatural

events detailed in the previous audio drama, *Bloodlust*. Their mutual friend Hallie arrives in the town, hot on the trail of a demon that possesses people and uses its victims' passions to create havoc.

As this is an equal mix of supernatural action and soap-style drama, the three main characters pretty much form a love triangle straight away, with poor David Collins slap bang in the middle. Add to this the usual supernatural conspiracy, and the result is a compelling and entertaining listen.

The plot cleverly inserts itself into *Dark Shadows* canon. There are some rather smart references to previous adventures, beyond those produced by Big Finish. The play is lovingly filled with Easter eggs for hardcore fans. All

of this is done without alienating new listeners; someone new to *Dark Shadows* will pick up the main themes pretty quickly and may well find themselves dragged into the drama.

The acting and production is of the high quality that we've come to demand of Big Finish. Kathleen Cody is particularly delightful as Hallie Stokes, reprising her role from the original TV series. Overall, if you ever wanted to get into *Dark Shadows*, this is a great place to start, especially if you ever wanted shows like *The Archers* to feature more ghosts. Fans will also be very pleased by this rather entertaining take on the show.

ED FORTUNE



**THE SHEPHERD'S
CROWN**

AUTHOR: TERRY PRATCHETT / **NARRATOR:** STEPHEN BRIGGS / **PUBLISHER:** RANDOM HOUSE AUDIOBOOKS / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Terry Pratchett's final contribution to the Discworld series does not really need a review nor, by now, should his work need an introduction.

Those who adore his work will go out and get it, and those who haven't as yet had the pleasure are unlikely to start with the last book. We listened to the audio version of *The Shepherd's Crown* anyway, just in case you were in two minds as to whether you should pick it up. The answer is a rather obvious yes, especially the audio version.

The Shepherd's Crown is not only the last Discworld novel, it's also the final story in the Tiffany Aching series, the cycle of books that Terry wrote specifically for the Young Adult market. Tiffany is a young witch who works on the chalk and is very much her own person. We've watched Aching grow from a precocious child to a confident teenager to finally a whole and complete person who also happens to be a strong leader and powerful witch. Pratchett created Tiffany, in part,

as a response to Harry Potter. His heroine has no great destiny or legions of people telling her she's special; rather than following her star, Aching works hard, gets results. This is fun for the reader because those results often involve beating up some sort of occult horror.

The Shepherd's Crown is also a book about dealing with death, on many levels. Terry wrote the book when he knew he had the Posterior Cortical Atrophy form of Alzheimer's Disease. Part of the plot features the death of someone close to Tiffany, and the aftermath of their passing forms much of the backstory of the book. This should not come as a surprise to fans; Death has always been a central character in Terry's work. Pratchett also returns to his theme of elves. The Discworld version of the point-eared fairy

beings paints them as parasitic monsters that delight in cruelty. They are a twisted mirror of humanity, creatures that do not understand the human condition and exist only to destroy it. Pratchett's essential humanity shines through, exploring the triumph of man without celebrating our hubris.

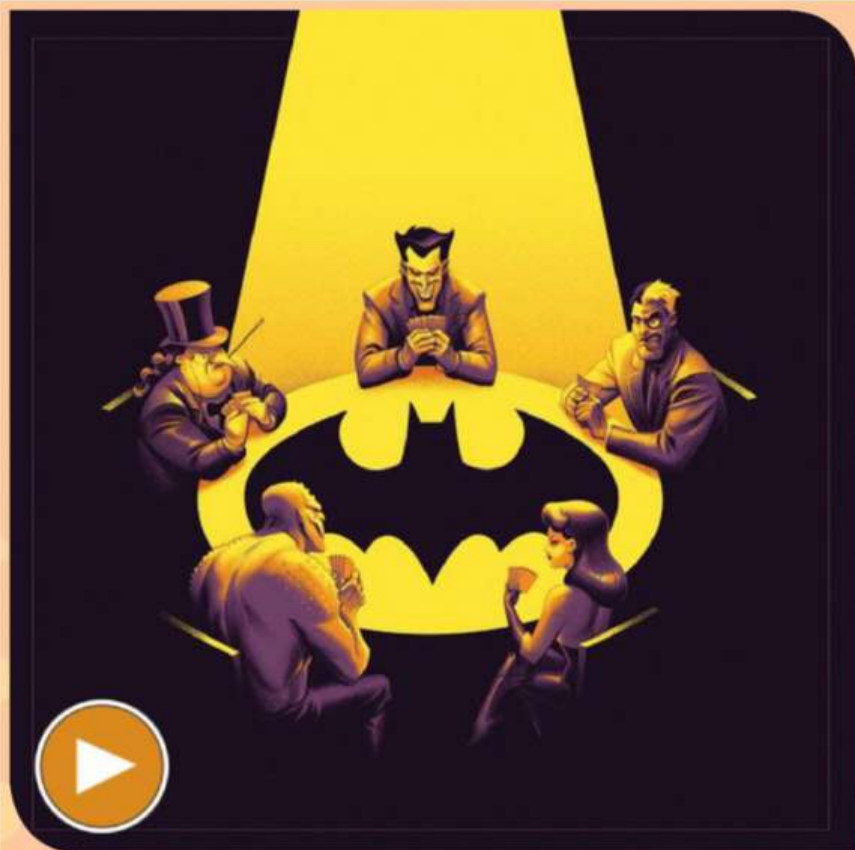
The entire audio version is narrated by Stephen Briggs, a contemporary and colleague of Pratchett's. His performance is spot on, even doing a reasonable impersonation of Christopher Lee when it comes to Death's brief cameo. If you've been putting off reading *The Shepherd's Crown*, then pick up the audio version to have a little bit of company when you leave the Discworld.

ED FORTUNE



OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



At the Beginning of October was the second annual MondoCon in Austin, Texas. As per last year, the convention featured quite a few exclusives. Some of these we'll see coming our way in standard retail versions, whereas others are already the province of eBay and Discogs flippers. Exclusives that are out of your hands already include Death Waltz Record Company's reissue of Ennio Morricone's much-loved **The Black Belly of the Tarantula**, along with event-exclusive Fabio Frizzi releases for his Frizzi 2 Fulci tour of **The Beyond** and Frizzi 2 Fulci Live. There's also an Umberto 7-inch featuring portions of his live re-score to **Pieces**. Mondo premiered their **Army of Darkness** and **Black Swan** scores, as well.

On November 18th, Mondo are also releasing a limited edition of 1200 copies box set featuring the complete scores to 16 episodes of **Batman: The Animated Series**. The packaging on this is gorgeous, as one would expect, but the eight LP set features the scores to some of the greatest episodes of the series

run: *On Leather Wings*, *Almost Got 'Im*, *Heart of Ice*, and *Beware the Gray Ghost*, among others. If you have the fast fingers and fat bank account needed to grab this, we're insanely jealous.

Hollywood Records released a compilation of Bear McCreary's score for Seasons One and Two of **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** Given the show's rising popularity, it's surprising that it took until the start of the show's third season for any sort of release, but we suppose this is better than nothing. The cover art's pretty great, and provides a pretty solid overview of the series thus far. As a few folks have commented online, the soundtrack release leans heavily on the more action-oriented portions of the show, so it's a fairly electronically-based album rather than your more traditional orchestral score; which makes sense, as we're talking television, rather than big screen entertainment, here.

We've another new label doing something a little different. Ondes Positives will be doing both cult

soundtrack releases as well as non-soundtrack material. The label's first release will be the experimental electronic score to the 1961 Canadian 3-D horror film, **The Mask** also known as **Eyes of Hell** as composed by Louis Applebaum. The vinyl LP will also include a re-score by the label's founders, Scott Johannsson and Nick Sales, performing under the moniker LARVA. Johannsson is also one half of the team behind the excellent *Damn Fine Cast*, whom we interviewed a few months back.

Speaking of *The Damn Fine Cast* the other host, Tony Giles, had started a campaign to get the original Graeme Revell score to the 1994 film **The Crow** released on vinyl. Not three weeks after the campaign started, it was announced by Varese Sarabande that the label would be releasing Revell's score on 180-gram vinyl on October 30th. It's a vinyl edition of the original CD release, and there are no extra tracks. To get the complete score, you'll need to track down an exhaustive Argentinian bootleg from 2011 containing an astonishing 40 tracks.

In further Varese news, the label's release of the eight CD box set for **A Nightmare on Elm Street** might be the best Halloween present anyone could ever ask for. In addition to all of the previously released material, each disc features unreleased cues, demo material, remixes, and more. It's all housed in a box wrapped in a Freddy Krueger sweater, and is limited to 2000 copies. The packaging is gorgeous, and given the wealth of musical goodies (the music from the video game in **Freddy's Dead!**), this will likely lead to weeks of obsessive immersion.

While on *The Damn Fine Cast* last month, Milan Records' Jean-Christophe



Chamboredon announced that the next two instalments in Milan's Nicolas Winding Refn series will be Brad Fiedel's original score for **The Terminator**, followed by **Ninja Scroll**. Both will have new art, and we should see **The Terminator** sometime in early 2016. The Refn series features deluxe vinyl editions of classic scores.

John Williams' score for **Star Wars: The Force Awakens** won't be released until December 18th, the day the film comes out (in the US, the UK gets it a day earlier). We'll keep our ears out for any new tidbits of music, but we've yet to hear anything beyond what's been in the various trailers. Here's hoping we don't have a repeat of what happened the last time the first score to a new trilogy was released. When the score to **The Phantom Menace** came out, it featured two tracks *Qui-Gon's Noble End* and *The High Council Meeting and Qui-Gon's Funeral* which spoiled the film for quite a few fans when they purchased it two weeks before the film's release.

Once you've had a chance to absorb the new music, why not dive back into the first six films' music? Sony Classical announced the release of Ultimate Editions of the music from the prequels and the original trilogy, due out January 8th. There will be **Star Wars: The Ultimate Vinyl Collection**, which is eleven LPs in gatefold sleeves. There's a compact disc version, which is nine CDs, along with a bonus CD featuring audio interviews with Harrison Ford and John Williams, as well as the DVD, **Star Wars: A Musical Journey**, a one-hour special highlighting select musical themes alongside key sequences from the films. **The Ultimate Digital Collection** is all six scores as high-definition downloads. Depending on your preference, the collections will run \$50-230.

Sony Classical's release of Danny Elfman's **Goosebumps** score was pushed back to October 23rd from October 9th, and we'd still not seen a track listing when we went to press. We were hoping against hope the score would feature Elfman's take on the Jack Lenz theme music for the '90s television program, but we've no idea. The film looks like a pile of hot garbage, but Elfman seems perfectly suited for the mix of zany and scary they



look to be aiming for, so we're hoping for something decent out of it, at least. Wake us up when there's a Harry Manfredini-scored take on **Fear Street**, though.

Continuing the Halloween theme, we've some news from SPACELAB9, who will be doing what appears to be their first reissue project. While they've put out vinyl releases of otherwise available material, the new **Addams Family** soundtrack reissue marks the first time they've put out something previously released on vinyl. However, given that the last time the Vic Mizzy music was available on vinyl was nearly 30 years ago, this fiftieth anniversary reissue is long-past due. Additionally, the SPACELAB9 version will feature the vocal version of the show's theme song, which wasn't available on any previous release. It's available on several retail-exclusive colourways, but should be really easy to get hold of by the time this issue hits your hands.

Back when Waxwork Records released their first LP Richard Band's score to **Re-Animator** little did we think that the label would kick off a renewed appreciation for the composer's music. In addition to last month's news of Band reissues from Perseverance and Waxwork comes the deluxe **Puppet Master** compilation from Full Moon Features. It's a collection of music from the first through fourth movies in the series, as well as the eighth and ninth, all housed in a gatefold sleeve. It's strange: if you own any Full Moon home video releases, you know that they're pretty basic transfers. However, this LP along with their **Bad Channels** double LP earlier this year seems to be a pretty robust collection. Fingers crossed this leads to **Doctor Mordrid** at some point in the future.

In further Band news, Intrada's jumping back into the vinyl game after who knows how many years with their upcoming reissue of Band's score to the 1986 B-movie awfulness that is **Troll**. It's a lovely gatefold sleeve and what looks like new cover art. You'll pay dearly for it, but it's good to see Intrada joining the ranks of the LP cognoscenti.

Kazuma Jinnouchi's score for **Halo 5: Guardians** will be out just a few days after the game itself at the end of this month. It will be available as both



a double CD and double LP set from Microsoft and 343 Industries. The score generated a bit of online notoriety when portions of it leaked during a beta test update back in August.

In super-duper video game soundtrack news, Data Discs released the list of their next four releases, and they're all corkers. Their third release will be Hirofumi Murasaki, Morihiko Akiyama and Masayuki Nagao's **Shinobi III**, and the fourth will be Koichi Namiki, Katsuhiro Hayashi and Shigeru Ohwada's **Super Hang-On**. Both will be available in three different colourways and are remastered specifically for vinyl after being sourced from the best available outputs. Pre-orders will launch in November, with December releases, but it's really just whetting your appetite for the next two LPs. Though there's no release dates set, fans will surely be champing at the bit for **Streets of Rage 2** and **Out Run**.

If you're looking for an excuse to buy Dario Argento's **Deep Red** again, Arrow Video's upcoming Blu-ray set includes the complete 28-track score on compact disc. The Blu-ray will obviously be a must-have when it comes out in December, but if you don't already own the score on LP from Dagored or Cinevox, or if you missed Cinevox's deluxe 2-CD set in 2012, then maybe this will tip this over the edge from want to need.

Speaking of things that are already out, we'll wrap this month's column with a selection of already-available scores which will be available on LP in the coming months: Geffen will reissue Basil Poledouris' score to **Conan the Barbarian** on November 13th. No idea of a pressing number, but given that it's a major label release at an affordable price, people will snatch it up simply because it's readily available and cheaper than the secondary market. Additionally, Silva Screen will press Blake Neely's **Arrow** score to fluorescent-green wax for a November 27th release.

Lastly, next month, we'll have a full feature interview with Waxwork Records' head Kevin Bergeron, as well as composer Harry Manfredini, talking about Waxwork's series of **Friday the 13th** vinyl reissues. **Part III** goes on-sale mid-November (hmm whatever day could it be?).



INTERVIEW - ALAN HOWARTH

Composer Alan Howarth has a lifetime of genre credits to entice even the most jaded of geeks. In addition to sound design for the first six *Star Trek* movies, Howarth has worked on *Army of Darkness*, *Stargate*, *Class of 1999*, and many more films, doing sound effects and and processing. Despite all that, however, the man is best known for his collaborations with John Carpenter, making music for that director's films such as *Escape from New York*, *They Live*, and *Prince of Darkness*. Recently, Howarth began performing portions of those scores live as part of his appearances at various conventions. He brings that show to London's Union Chapel at October's end. He performs *Escape from New York* on the 30th, and a medley of the music of *Halloween II-VI* on the 31st. We spoke with Howarth about his career, performing live, and how creating sound effects and making music aren't all that different.

STARBURST: How did you come to be playing these scores live?

Alan Howarth: I was invited to speak at a convention as part of a panel, and I said, Well, rather than talk about it, why don't I play it? and they said, You can do that? To which I said, Of course: I'm a musician! So, sort of on my own, I put it together. I got a bunch of cues from *Halloween* together, and then I have my laptop computer, my MIDI keyboard, and my guitar. I play the cues from the movie, but I also play on top of it, so it's like music minus one or music plus one; however you want to think about it.

That's where it started. Somebody put it up on YouTube, and so it got out there that Alan can do this. From there, it came about that there was the Unsound Music Festival in Poland, and they were doing a theme around horror movie music, and a friend said, Oh, you've got to get Alan to play, and then I was invited to Poland to do this. It was just a great community – a great time. When there, I was hooked up with a band called Zombie Zombie, which is a two-man group – and they'd done a tribute to John Carpenter record, so they knew all this stuff – so I literally sat in on their set, and we jammed.

The theme was *The Pleasure of a Good Scare*, and in addition to Zombie Zombie, I hooked up with a VJ – a lady by the name of Jade Boyd, who did video improvisation as I played my set. She's now my buddy, and she's on board. I have her do live performance whenever she can, behind my set, and if the timing and budget's not there, she created a video for me that's this abstract VJ version of the films. It's very artsy – colour changes, runs backward, and all that.

That's my show now, and I've been doing this all over the world. I use Zombie Zombie when they're available. We've done Paris; we did Geneva, St. Petersburg, obviously Poland. And on my own, I've done my sets with Jade in London, she was in Toronto with me and on my own, I still do New York and L.A., and now London again for Chills in the Chapel.

With those visual components now added in, do you find that the response has changed?

Yeah. It's much more entertaining to have images, because otherwise it's a guy sitting at a keyboard, playing. To have those movies that the music goes with to be part of the show, it's almost like an old silent movie, right? Just soundtrack only. I like the fact that they're abstract, because it's not just the movie itself. It's the essence of the movie and the score that goes with that scene, be it whatever – *Halloween* or *Escape from New York* or *Prince of Darkness* – that I did with John Carpenter, that's been on revival.

So, this whole world of electronic music and even horror movies has gone back to this synth score stuff that I did back then. When we did this back in the '80s, I never thought I'd still be doing it in 2015, but it's fun and I enjoy it.

In terms of improvisation, what are you vamping on?

It is improv, but I've made selections

in advance of the instrument sounds I'm going to use in that cue. They're all original patches from the Prophet 5, which was my featured instrument. I'm using Prophet 5 patches in what are now software synths which are great stuff. I mean, I'd love to haul all the gear around, but it's just too much hassle. It's just too much. The guys in Poland said, 'Man, if you set all that stuff up, people'd go crazy!' I said, 'Yeah - me, too. Keeping all that up and running, with all that vintage gear - we're not at that budget level. I mean, I'd love to do it properly - bring Zombie Zombie with me, because that way I pick up another keyboard player and a drummer, and obviously live is live. That'd be great.'

But, in this case, it's partially sequenced, or choreographed already in the computer, and I've got my patches to play on top of it. Same thing with the movie - I'll play the sounds that are in the cue already, but I'll vamp on the various themes and add another layer on top.

Given that a lot of the work you did with John Carpenter in the '80s is getting reissued as of late, we're curious as to how involved you've been with those projects?

I provide the audio masters, if I still have them. I'm a bit of a pack rat, so I have the original quarter-inch masters from the vinyl of the day. So, they can go back to the original track, take it, do the noise reduction, and run a modern EQ for vinyl. I've been very involved with those guys on all that stuff. Spencer [Hickman, Death Waltz Recording Co.] is a great guy, and now that he's with Mondo, that's widened the audience and the distribution. It's also fun that they're limited editions. People like the idea that there are only 1000 of them, so it works both ways.

As much as people identify you with John Carpenter, it seems that it would be equally as accurate to identify you with the *Star Trek* films and your sound

design for them. What are the similarities between composing and sound design?

The similarities are that I'm on the same gear, I'm in the same studio - it's just, 'What assignment are we doing?' For me, even back in high school, I was already a fan of very avant-garde, effect-y music, like the Stockhausens, the Chefefskys, some of the early synth guys - I was into all that stuff. I remember doing a paper back in high school on whether this stuff was really music or not.

Of course, I was an advocate, saying basically, 'Look: the definition of music is the alternation of sound and silence, so if you're just making a noise and turning it on and off - that's music. So, [sound effects work] is, in a way, music, but it's crafted to be synchronised with a particular image.'

In high school, I played in rock 'n' roll bands, and we got kind of big regionally, opening for The Who and Cream, and I brought all of this rock 'n' roll stuff in my toolkit when I started working with John.

We can see how something like *musique concrète* or musicians of that style would dovetail nicely with making sounds for things which don't yet have sounds.

Yes, that was where I found the slot. At the time, before digital effects, these were very expensive practical effects. They made a big model of the Enterprise, with all these motion control cameras that would make several passes, and they'd all be composited, then - what does the Enterprise sound like?

My very first audition tape was for *Star Trek*. As a technician, one of the bands I worked with was called Weather Report - a very famous jazz band - and I was the keyboard tech. A friend of mine Pax, from Ohio, was working at Paramount in the transfer department, and these two sound effects editors - Richard Anderson and Stephen Flick - were having this conversation about how they were going to need someone who knew something



about synthesisers.

My buddy turns around and goes, 'Oh, you gotta talk to my buddy, Alan, man, he works for Weather Report!' like they knew what that was. They say, 'Weather report?' Is that the one at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock?

They give me a call and say, 'Your buddy Pax says you know something about synthesisers. Can you make the sound of the starship Enterprise going from warp one to warp seven?' I went home, sat down with my little Prophet synthesiser and dialed up something that was an effect. I turned that in, and that audition tape became the sound of the Enterprise. That's what got me the gig in the movie business.

That's what started this whole thread. Meeting John Carpenter was because of *Star Trek*. The picture editor from the first *Star Trek* movie, Todd Ramsey, was the picture editor on *Escape from New York*. So, it's all kind of wrapped together, and at that time, before all the computers, et cetera, et cetera, I became a specialist at making sounds for things that didn't make sound - they had to be imagined. It was just a natural flow for me. It wasn't outside my wheelhouse.

The interesting part was that, at that time, I'd turn in all that stuff on synthesisers, and they'd say that it was cool for electronic things, but they needed organic sounds. At that time, it was before samplers, so it was all tape art. I'd have my little half-inch eight-track recorder, and I had my loops going through guides and mic stands around the room, making tape loops.

It was all tape art, same as that *musique concrète* stuff. It was just another application of this sort of skill set. And it was fun. There's nothing so creative as when you're restricted. When you only have a few choices, you have to squeeze something out of what you got, and that's what a lot of those things were.

NICK SPACEK



Alan Howarth performs October 30th and 31st at the Union Chapel in Islington, London. You can find information and tickets at unionchapel.org.uk.



INTERVIEW - CECIL BALDWIN (WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE)

CECIL BALDWIN is an American voice and stage actor best known for his role as radio DJ Cecil Gershwin Palmer in the popular horror audio drama podcast **WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE**. We caught up with him to find more about the show and its fans...

STARBURST: How much are you like the Cecil from *Welcome to Night Vale*?

Cecil Baldwin: There's slight differences. It's not too far off the mark. I find the best acting is when you bring yourself to the character. A lot of times when I get a script, I bring myself to it and react the way I would react to the situation. Obviously, that's not appropriate all the time. I would say Cecil Palmer is more optimistic and a little more willing to accept the way things are. I'm a little more cynical and a little more questioning.

If I lived in a town where the city council were horrible eldritch abominations that could eat people at any moment, I'd probably question my place in that town a lot more than Cecil Palmer does. I like to think that the character is a Hufflepuff and I am a Slytherin.

How familiar were you with creepy horror before *Welcome to Night Vale*?

I've been a horror fan for my entire adult life. When I was a teenager, I used to watch a lot of horror movies and here in the U.S. we had a network that showed late night movies on the weekends called *Up All Night*. It was hosted by Gilbert Gottfried and Rhonda Shear. They just pulled out the worst, terrible B-movies and I was in love with that when I was a teenager and, of course, I read Stephen King. When I got older, I was exposed to more H.P. Lovecraft and I branched out into horror movies and my tastes got more sophisticated. I got into David Lynch and David Cronenberg as well as Italian directors such as Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento, people like that. I've been a fan of all different types of suspenseful stuff. So

when Joseph gave me the pilot script for *Welcome to Night Vale*, I got the subtle and dry humour of it. I also understood the spookiness of a man behind a microphone broadcasting out into the unknown.

Very early on, I talked to the show's creators, Joseph Fink and Jeffrey Cranor, about the existential creepiness of Cecil's dilemma. He's never quite sure if there's other people out there in the world because he's stuck in that studio all the time!

What is the enduring appeal of horror?

We like to test ourselves. For humanity to confront our darkest fears in a safe environment. When you go camping and you're sitting around the fire and you're telling ghost stories it's a way for you to see what you're made of. It's a way for us to ask ourselves what if I was suddenly confronted by a maniac wielding a knife? What if aliens came down and took me to an inhospitable alien place? Would I be able to survive? Would I get through it? Someone said that horror movies are a testing ground for the teenage soul. It's for us to see what we're made of and people like that. We want to be challenged.

What is it that makes *Night Vale* so creepy?

There's something very intimate about radio, more so than reading a book or watching a film. You're forming an image in your brain while a person is speaking to you. You don't know what that person looks like whilst you're on the other end of the radio dial but they are talking directly to you. When that intimacy combines with the challenge of imagining you were in a town where oranges can start turning into monsters is very appealing. It got people hooked. The listeners keep coming back because they've formed this relationship with Cecil Palmer and they want to know if they could exist in his world. There's something about *Night Vale* that is very sincere in its emotional honesty. It's not sugar-coating the world. We talk about a lot of really heavy stuff, but we do it in a way that isn't talking down to the audience but is kind of hopeful at the same time. It's a very honest and refreshing take on the world that we live in.

What's next for you?

Night Vale is still going and we're not planning on going anywhere! I do other work; we do an evening called *Shipwrecked*, where I read erotic fan fiction based on novels aloud to audiences. I work with the neo-futurists. I would love to do more cartoon and anime voices; I just recently did a voice for a character called Tad Strange on Disney's *Gravity Falls*. I'd also think doing some Big Finish *Doctor Who* would be a lot of fun. My father was a big fan and I've seen both the old and new show.

ED FORTUNE

WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE: A NOVEL is out in all good book shops from October 20th The podcast can be found at commonplacebooks.com

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HOLMES VS. HELLRAISER Novel Coming Soon

Horror writer Paul Kane is to produce a **Sherlock Holmes/Hellraiser** crossover called **Sherlock Holmes and the Servants of Hell** in 2016. Clive Barker has granted permission for his notorious Cenobites to face the world's greatest detective in what promises to be the greatest Holmes adventure yet. The famous detective and his loyal companion Watson will take on The Order of the Gash as more and more people go missing in horrible ways. The duo will descend into London's underworld in more ways than one.

STAR WARS AFTERMATH is a Hit Amid Controversy

Chuck Wendig's latest novel, **Star Wars Aftermath**, reached the New York Times Bestseller list in the first week of its release, despite criticism. Following Disney's resetting of the **Star Wars** Universe, the book is the first work to detail what happens after the events of the movie **Return of the Jedi**. The work has been the victim of two critical online campaigns. One group is angry that Disney are no longer acknowledging the Timothy Zahn books as the official sequel. A second group is angry that Wendig has introduced another gay character into the **Star Wars** Universe. Sinjir Rath Velus is an Imperial turncoat who serves the Rebellion and later reveals his sexuality after rebuffing a female character. Both groups have attempted to smear the novel, but this has only increased interest in the book and the word of mouth on the work is very positive indeed.

Abaddon Parties for 10 Year Anniversary

Franchise factory and purveyor of fine pulp genre books, Abaddon, celebrated ten years in the industry in fine style recently. Wine and cake were made available in an exclusive Soho venue to a select audience of industry professionals and writers. Abaddon was founded by Rebellion Publishing in 2005. Rebellion is also responsible for **2000 AD**, Solaris books and Raven Stone. The event also launched a new line of Abaddon stories, called **Invaders From Beyond**, a lightly comic series that covers alien invasion.

Angry Robot Opens Submissions Window

Hit genre publisher Angry Robot has opened its doors to all-comers. The Nottingham-based publisher usually only accepts submissions from agents or established authors. The opportunity will be available from December 1st, 2015 until January 31st, 2016 and is open to full-length science fiction and fantasy novels. Previous entrants include Wesley Chu, who went on to win awards for his books **The Lives of Tao**, **The Deaths of Tao**, **The Rebirths of Tao**.

Canadian Copper Cylinder Award Winners Announced

The Sunburst Award Society has announced the winners of the fourth annual Copper Cylinder Awards for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic. The Adult Award winner is **The Back of the Turtle** by Thomas King. The Young Adult Award winner is **The Door in the Mountain** by Caitlin Sweet. Copper Cylinder award winners are selected by members of the Sunburst Award Society for books published the previous year.

Ursula Vernon Wins Cyotl Award for Best Short Story

The Cýotl Awards are handed out by The Furry Writers' Guild for Excellence in Anthropomorphic Literature. This year's awards, for works published in 2014, were announced at RainFurthest in Seattle, USA. The winners include: Rukis' **Off the Beaten Path**, which won Best Novel, Renee Carter Hall's **Huntress** (Best Novella), and Best Short Story went to Hugo Award-winning writer and artist, Ursula Vernon, for **Jackalope Wives**.

2000 AD Wins UK Podcasters Arts Award

STARBURST's own **Book Worm Podcast** went up against **2000 AD** to compete for the Arts category of New Media Europe's inaugural UK Podcasters Awards. Congratulations to **2000 AD**, who took away the trophy. The STARBURST RADIO SHOW took away the award for best Film and TV podcast.

SFWA has a Recruitment Anthem

Fan band Emperor Stardust and the Eunuchs of the Forbidden City have created a song called Radio SFWA. The song will be performed for the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) at the Nebula Awards Ceremony in May 2016. Lyrics include the lines *Radio SFWA, radio and tell us if you're ready to join SFWA, Radio SFWA, radio, we'll send the Rescue Mothership to fetch you. Radio SFWA, radio and you will know that you're never alone.*

Amazon Appoints Director of Social Responsibility

Monolithic online shopping phenomenon Amazon have appointed Christine Bader as Director of Social Responsibility. Amazon has received a great deal of criticism for its business practices, especially in the publishing industry. Last year, Amazon was embroiled in intense negotiations with publisher Hachette. The online retailer is also facing scrutiny over its cloud services, receiving low grades in Greenpeace's annual cloud cleanliness report. Bader is the author of **The Evolution of a Corporate Idealist: When Girl Meets Oil** and the former advisor to the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative for business and human rights.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

COMING SOON

ED FORTUNE
HIGHLIGHTS
NOTEWORTHY
NEW TITLES



THE ASSIMILATED CUBAN'S GUIDE TO QUANTUM SANTERÍA

AUTHOR: CARLOS HERNANDEZ
PUBLISHER: ROSARIUM PUBLISHING
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1ST

Marketed as a collection of short sci-fi stories in the style of *Kij Johnson* and *Kelly Link*, which is enough to catch our attention. This is an anthology brings together stories with the theme of those trying to rebuild their lives, but with a genre twist.

We meet a pianist who literally puts all of himself into his music and someone else who has a unique way of talking to their mother. Each story is another examination of self-actualisation and realisation, spiced up with imagination.



ANCESTRAL MACHINES: A HUMANITY'S FIRE NOVEL

AUTHOR: MICHAEL COBLEY
PUBLISHER: ORBIT
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 7TH

Cobley is rapidly becoming one to watch when it comes to epic space opera. **Ancestral Machines** is the next instalment in his *Humanity's Fire* series. It wouldn't be space opera without some grand stellar structure, and **Ancestral Machines** features *The Warcage*, a space ship made out of two hundred worlds harnessed to an artificial sun. Its original purpose has been subverted, turning into a pan-galactic warmachine. Can a brave smuggler stop this machine? You can bet he will try.



TRUTHWITCH

AUTHOR: SUSAN DENNARD
PUBLISHER: TOR
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 14TH

Susan Dennard has begun a new and rather exciting Young Adult series called **Witchlands**. The first book, **Truthwitch**, follows the fates of young witches Safiya and Iseult, who have a talent for getting in trouble. After crossing the wrong person one time too many, they find themselves on the run from their homeland. To make matters worse, Safiya's special ability to magically determine the truth makes her a high target for more disreputable types. With war about to sweep across the land, the two are in quite a bit of danger as some will stop at nothing to obtain the powers of a Truthwitch.



THIS CENSUS-TAKER

AUTHOR: CHINA MIÉVILLE
PUBLISHER: DEL REY BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 5TH

China Miéville is a master of gripping and strange reading. **This Census-Taker** is the story of a boy who is trapped in a remote house on a hilltop with a dangerously crazed family member. No one visits, no one comes. He dreams of a different life, one not spent in isolation. When that day comes however, the strange meticulous man who visits brings more questions and danger than the boy could have ever dreamed of. Filled with beauty, terror, and strangeness, **This Census-Taker** is a poignant and riveting exploration of memory and identity.



THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: MURDER AT SORROW'S CROWN

AUTHOR: STEVEN SAVILE, ROBERT GREENBERGER
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1ST

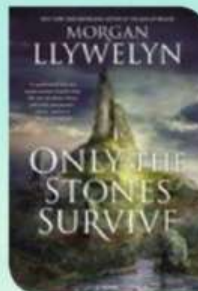
More Sherlock Holmes shenanigans from Steven Savile (**Torchwood**) and Marvel/DC comics creator Robert Greenberger. When a frantic mother arrives at Sherlock's doorstep begging for help, The World's Greatest Detective finds himself aboard the HMS Dido, a ship used in the Boer War. Beneath the surface, however, are secrets and lies that seem set to destroy the very fabric of The British Empire and our very way of life.



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

AUTHOR: ALAN DEAN FOSTER
PUBLISHER: DEL REY
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 17TH

Alan Dean Foster is the go-to guy for the highest quality science fiction tie-ins, the master of the franchise novel. He wrote the original novelisation of the first **Star Wars** film, and has the likes of **Alien**, **Star Trek** and many, many others under his belt. So it's pretty much a given that he's writing the novelisation of the latest **Star Wars** movie. We know that the book version is going to be in safe hands, and any word nerd and **Star Wars** fan worth the name will be picking this up to see what secrets they can glean.



ONLY THE STONES SURVIVE

AUTHOR: MORGAN LLYWELYN
PUBLISHER: FORGE
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 5TH

Irish mythology is a rich source of inspiration for many fantasy writers. Morgan Llywelyn has dived into the deep myth of the Túatha Dé Danann to tell a tale about a place where time is different. When the Children of Milesios ignore the advice of their druids and come looking for treasure and power, they initiate a war in which no one can win. This tale of immigration, loss, and transformation promises to be gripping.



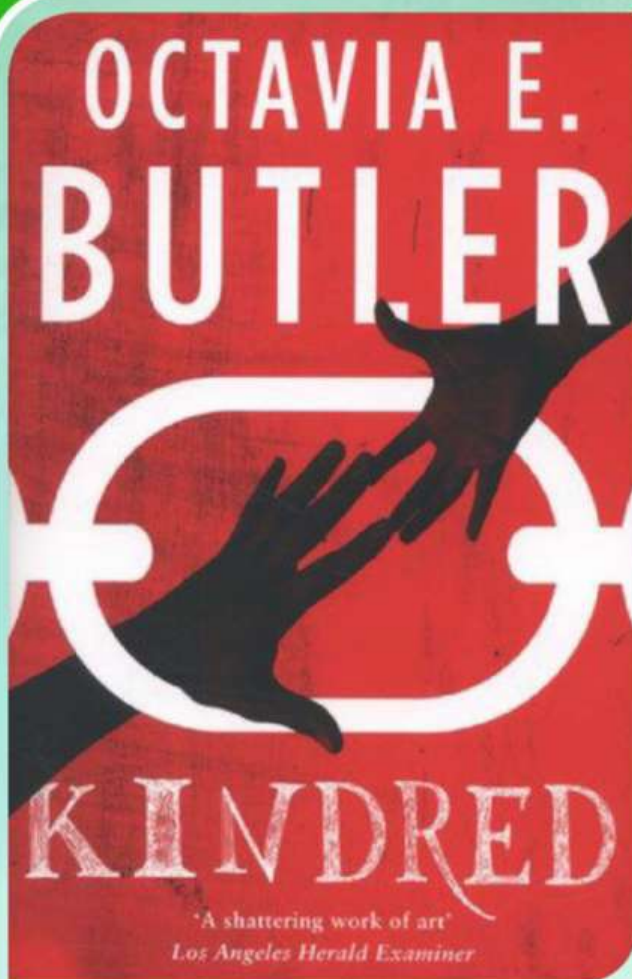
TRAVELERS REST

AUTHOR: KEITH LEE MORRIS
PUBLISHER: LITTLE BROWN AND COMPANY
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 5TH

What happens when you become lost in both space and time? Well, if we ignore every episode of **Doctor Who**, then who can say? Morris has created a unique, fiercely gripping and deeply unsettling horror fairy tale that explores the consequences of becoming utterly unstuck in the fabric of space-time. Expect a morbid yet compelling look at the idea of becoming a cosmic hobo featuring a hotel that one can never truly leave.

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS

BOOK WORMHOLE



Every time I look at a list of book recommendations, I find Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*. It's a must-read for bibliophiles, revered in every online review, and yet it hasn't entered the public consciousness like *The Great Gatsby* or *Huckleberry Finn*. Unlike *The Hobbit*, it's never been adapted to film. Needless to say, I was curious.

The novel starts with newlywed Dana Franklin being unceremoniously torn from 1976 Los Angeles and dumped in the antebellum South. The trip only lasts a few minutes, but then it happens again. And again. Always to the same place

and always at the feet of the same person: Rufus Weylin, a plantation owner's son. As her trips become longer and she becomes more involved in the past, Dana must figure out not only why she's time travelling, but how to survive in the last place a black woman wants to be.

I understand now why *Kindred* is praised all across the Internet: it is a phenomenal novel. It's tense, brutal and thought-provoking, forcing readers to look at racism historically, personally, and intersectionally. As a book, it also makes readers question the whiteness of the time travel narrative. It

wasn't until I read *Kindred* that I actually sat down and thought about how white (and male) time travel stories are. From H. G. Wells' hero to Marty McFly to the Doctor and most of his companions, the protagonists of time travel fiction are almost always white, and with that whiteness comes a privilege that is often ignored. To white time travellers, history is an adventure. It's everything you see in a period drama: grand balls and important speeches and servants to take away your breakfast tray. But for time travellers like Dana, who has the dual disadvantage of being black and female, the only thing that awaits them in Western history is oppression. It's hard to find joy in an environment that threatens you, and without that exploratory spirit, the time travel narrative completely changes. And it's a good change - a wanted change - because the white experience of history isn't the only one we should read about, and the white voice isn't the only one we should hear.

As much as I love the book as an object, I love the story even more. *Kindred* grabs you immediately, throwing you into Dana's head and then thrusting the both of you in to action after action and never letting you find your feet. It's disorienting and discomforting, and suits the subject matter incredibly well. Butler uses time travel to compare and contrast the subtle racism of her present (the 1970s) with the more overt racism of the colonial South, exploring the impacts they have on both victim and villain. Dana is the most affected, but we also get to see the effect it has on Rufus Weylin and Dana's white husband Kevin. Rufus grows up amidst the horrors of slavery yet from a place of privilege as a white man, an upbringing that Dana tries to

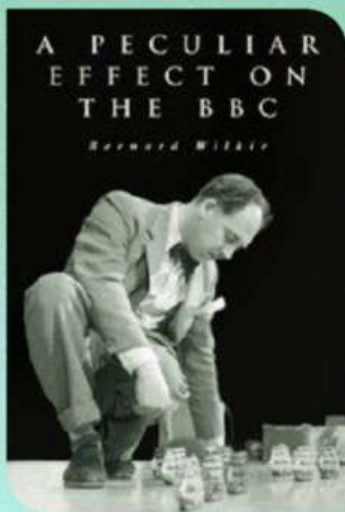
combat. This leaves him torn between what he feels (love for his black childhood friends) and what people other than Dana have taught him. Kevin doesn't have Rufus' racism, but it isn't until a visit to the past that he realises how many ways his white privilege benefits him, including allowing him a happier view of history. Butler also explores the way race and gender intersect, which was what I loved reading about. Dana's experiences as a black woman are different from those of a black man, particularly in the 1800s. Not only does she live under the threat of physical violence, as all genders do, but as a woman, she also lives under the threat of sexual violence. Catching the attention of the white plantation owner has a level of consequence that a black man is spared from, and in many ways that makes the past more harrowing for her. I love that Butler doesn't shy away from exploring the many layers of racism and the differing ways it affects people. It makes for a wonderfully complex novel.

That being said, there is one part I'm not too thrilled about, and that's the prose. *Kindred* is told in Dana's first-person narration, and while there are moments of incredible intimacy, much of the story feels very distant. Dana's voice can be formal and often spells out how she feels, and given the subject matter, I expected something closer and more emotional. But that shouldn't stop you from picking up this book because, regardless, I couldn't put it down.

Kindred deserves to be on all those book lists. It deserves all of your time and praise and the space on your bookshelf that it's just begging to occupy. It certainly deserves a film adaptation. If you want an unforgettable read, then *Kindred* is it.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



A PECULIAR EFFECT ON THE BBC

**AUTHOR: BERNARD WILKIE / PUBLISHER: MIWK /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Older fans of Doctor Who – and possibly anyone who paid attention to the slow-rolling end credits of many BBC TV productions from the 1950s to the 1970s – will surely recognise the name Bernard Wilkie. After blagging his way into the BBC in the early 1950s, Bernard found

himself heading up the Corporation's extremely primitive first visual effects department, providing extraordinarily rudimentary smoke and practical effects for a raft of BBC productions as the corporation found its post-War feet and started to revolutionise the TV industry. At first, Wilkie had no real idea what he was doing and pretty much made up his 'art' on the spot, aided in time by the equally-legendary Jack Kine in a partnership which continued until the latter retired at the end of the 1970s.

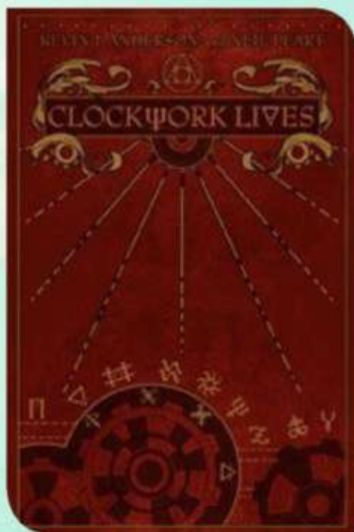
Wilkie, along with Kine, a two-man FX army, worked on pretty much every well-regarded production to come out of the BBC Studios during what might be known as its 'glory years'. Wilkie passed away in 2002, but he wrote his 'memoirs' in the 1990s and now they finally see the light of day in the form of this charming, occasionally vague, but often quite amusing collection of memories, anecdotes and tall tales. It's very definitely not an autobiography; we find out little about Bernard himself except that he and his colleagues liked a drink or two after work. It is, though, a breezy and likable wander through an extraordinary and underappreciated career. Wilkie was present when the BBC aired its Quatermass serials, the ground-breaking live broadcasts of George Orwell's 1984, and countless unnamed one-off

dramas, plays and series. Wilkie and Kine virtually created the special effects industry in British TV and Wilkie seems remarkably self-effacing about his contribution and his legacy – but that probably says more about the era he worked in than the man himself. Fans of Doctor Who might be disappointed that there's no dirt to be dished here, just some familiar behind-the-scenes stories, but the book really comes alive in Wilkie's evocative descriptions of the early days of BBC Television Centre – he was working there before it was even completed – and early FX experiments which went hilariously wrong. Bernard writes fondly about his work with Dave Allen (one of his favourites) and chapters on *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* are more interesting than they have any right to be.

Warm and readable, Bernard Wilkie's story is one of a true pioneer. Its lack of a narrative throughline is a bit frustrating – there's no sense of a career developing, no dates to pin to certain productions so many of Wilkie's memories exist in a sort of timeless vacuum. It's a charming if sometimes slight read – but you'll be left with the feeling that the definitive history of BBC Special Effects is yet to be written.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 7



CLOCKWORK LIVES

**AUTHOR: NEIL PEART, KEVIN J. ANDERSON
/ PUBLISHER: ECW PRESS / RELEASE DATE:
NOVEMBER 5TH**

Life was very simple for Marinda Peake. That is, until her father bestowed her with a copy of a rather unique book that would change her life in more adventurous ways than she could ever have imagined.

Clockwork Lives sees the continuation of the fantastical steampunk world brought to life in Kevin J. Anderson and Rush drummer Neil Peart's *Clockwork Angels*, as they return to the Watchmaker's world to tell the story of Marinda Peake and a unique alchemical book.

Marinda lives an organised and peaceful life in the quiet village of Lugtown, but all that soon changes as she inherits a rather unusual gift from her dear departed father that comes with a very specific set of instructions. Not every daughter dreams of inheriting their very own alchemical book that must be filled with other people's stories, but Marinda suddenly finds herself thrown into a life-changing task as part of her father's mysterious inheritance, that will take her far from her comfortable life in Lugtown.

It takes her across the skies and beyond – from airships, to carnivals and

travelling bookshops – to collect stories fit for this rather unusual book. From the interwoven tales around the mysterious Watchmaker who has brought order to the people, to the astonishing strongman Golson, and his journey with the Carnival Extraganza, each story is brought together to fill her book of unique stories as Marinda finds herself on a journey of her own that she could never have dreamt of.

Clockwork Lives brings each story together along the way, as we follow not just Marinda's journey but the paths of each individual that she meets along the way, making for a rather steampunk-styled Canterbury Tales of stories, all interwoven together in ways that Marinda herself could never have imagined.

A rollercoaster of a tale that makes for a wonderfully entertaining read, whether you enjoy the whimsical steam-powered world of steampunk or not, you'll certainly find it an intriguing and wonderful story.

LEONA TURFORD

★★★★★★★ 9



GHOSTBUSTERS: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

AUTHOR: DANIEL WALLACE
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Over thirty years since the first arrival of the Ghostbusters onto our cinema screens, the

franchise is still going strong. Considering that there has not been another adventure cast onto celluloid since the 1989 sequel, it is testament to the strength of writing in the first film that such a fervent fanbase still exists and watches the movie over and over again. Sure, there is the all-female cast reboot coming next year, but let us cast our minds - and our eyes - back to the beginning.

This hardcover book has a foreword from Dan Aykroyd and an introduction from Ivan Reitman, which only leads you back into the world of ghosts and ghouls that so enthralled us three decades ago. If you're a fan, there is plenty in here to interest you. There are loads of behind the scenes pictures that show just how much damn

fun it must have been to make these films. All the core cast and crew are involved here in one way or another, and it is subtle in its remembrance of the late Harold Ramis without resorting to schmaltz.

It's fascinating, as always with films from the childhoods of some of us, to see concept sketches that have probably not seen the light of day before. Designs for sadly unrealised ghosts, as well as previous incarnations of well-known and loved characters - especially Slimer (aka Onionhead), Mr Stay Puft and the Demon Dogs - are all on show here. There is a great breakdown of the scene where Dana is attacked in her armchair by the demon arms which shows just how game Sigourney Weaver was for the

realism of the film.

The book doesn't scrimp on covering the sequel either, with just as much depth covered as the original, which is just as much fun and interesting (even if the film itself isn't).

In addition, there are sections that cover the soundtracks and the expanded universe, including the different animated incarnations, video games, comics and toys. Also included is a very brief section on fandom and the future of the franchise.

Basically, for any Ghostbusters fan, this is an essential purchase.

J D GILLAM

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



SOME KIND OF HERO: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE JAMES BOND FILMS

AUTHOR: MATTHEW FIELD, AJAY CHOWDHURY
PUBLISHER: THE HISTORY PRESS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The story of how Albert R. Broccoli's Eon Productions started the James Bond film franchise and how it has coped with the economics and

stresses of the film industry, critical reactions, box office hits and misses, competition from rival action movies, and changes in society, is told through 120 primary interviews with cast and crew that spans the 1960s to the present day.

For good measure, Field and Chowdhury, themselves two self-confessed Bond film fans, also refer to published interviews and information from magazines, newspapers, radio, television and websites.

The foreword is by George Lazenby, who starred as Bond in On Her Majesty's Secret Service. At the time, this former male model got a roasting for not living up to the standard of Sean Connery's Bond, yet over the years fans have warmed to the film and his take on Bond.

Through chapters on

Bond creator Ian Fleming and producers Albert Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, we find there was a web of film and television ideas pitched and rejected before Dr No hit our screens in 1962. The authors quote Connery's approach to the character as "James Bond is very much for breaking the rules. He enjoys freedom that the normal person doesn't get. He likes to eat. He likes to drink. He likes his girls. He is rather cruel, sadistic."

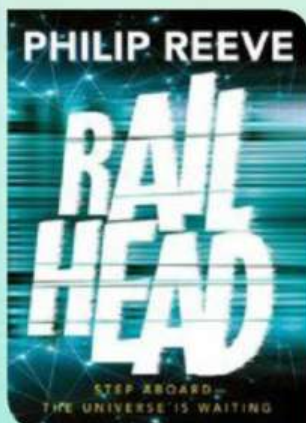
At times critics have expected Bond to die due to his outdated misogyny and his relationship with women. Roger Moore, in particular, shamelessly undermined the Bond mystique, which at times brought it down to the level and humour of Carry On films. Nonetheless, Moore was able to keep Bond alive during the 1970s and 1980s.

During this period, the 'Bond Girl' formula gave way to more assertive women, and with the arrival of Timothy Dalton in *The Living Daylights* (1987) and *Licence to Kill* (1989) there was the introduction of the 'Bond Woman' who can challenge and equal Bond. It is noteworthy that in the publicity for *SPECTRE*, a 'Bond Girl' is underlined as being equal to Bond, though we have yet to get an ugly, older or overweight Bond girl!

Over the decades, styles and expectations have changed and this book is a worthy chronicle of how Bond has continued to bring action and glamour to our screens.

NIGEL WATSON

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



RAILHEAD

AUTHOR: PHILIP REEVE
PUBLISHER: OUP OXFORD
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Creating a compelling story for Young Adult readers can be a daunting task to undertake. The author needs to make a story with relatable characters and a tight plot, all whilst telling a story full of adventure. Luckily, Philip Reeve has managed to do this with his previous works, and now returns with his new novel, *Railhead*.

Railhead follows a young boy called Zen Starling in very much a story focused on adventure. The main premise of the book is that the galaxy is now linked through a series of train networks, and travelling from one planet to another via a train is completely normal. The novel is focused on Zen and his thieving ways, but it

soon becomes clear that there are hidden mysteries to be solved. The character of Zen can seem a bit bland, but this is likely to be a compromise that had to be made due to the shortness of the book when compared to other science fiction novels.

The novel is well paced, with Reeves managing to understand the needs of YA readers. However, the novel does also work for adult readers, but the unrelatability of the work may make it less appealing.

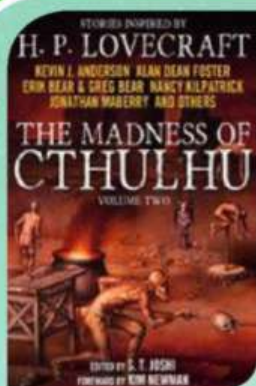
It is very much a straightforward adventure tale, with many mysterious events occurring. This will be more suited to fans of sci-fi, but the epic fantasy elements

contained within the novel will make it appealing to more than just fans of science fiction. Although the novel does have quite an original story, it can be difficult to create a novel that is completely original, and it is clear that the novel was very much inspired by other major sci-fi novels.

The small scope of *Railhead* allows this to be a great starting point if a reader is keen to try reading sci-fi. For YA readers, however, this novel may be the stand out sci-fi novel of the year, although not overly a breakthrough novel.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE MADNESS OF CTHULHU: VOLUME TWO

AUTHOR: VARIOUS
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 23RD

For all its popularity as the granddaddy of cosmic horror stories, the Lovecraft Mythos proves to be a surprisingly difficult subject for some authors to nail. Requiring a very exact blend of unknowable horror, science fiction, fantasy and inevitable doom, many sadly end up simply using the tropes or trace elements over fully embracing the source material. It's one thing to have Cthulhu in your book, but it's another entirely to not just turn him into Godzilla. On this form *The Madness of Cthulhu – Volume Two* is hit and miss. Some nail what's required for a tale of this mythos, while others try to play around with the source material to mixed effect.

The most noted difficulty stems from the era in which each

book is set and how well each story fits Lovecraft's infamous purple prose. Many opt for an unconventional approach given the subject matter, either setting the story in the modern day or even the far future in many cases. In some situations this proves to be surprisingly effective with Greg Bear's contribution serving as a scarily effective apocalyptic logbook left by doomed stellar explorers, while others such as *Dead Man Walking* and *A Crazy Mistake* sadly prove to be misfires. This is mostly due to both authors styling their tales in an almost laid back and overly informal manner, with the apparent objective being to emulate humour rather than horror.

For every tale which pulls

off the horror angle perfectly such as *The Autonomy Lesson*, *The Hollow Sky* and – most surprisingly given the author – *20,000 Years Under The Sea*, another will fail to convey any real horror. The end result is an extremely mixed read which is more worth a library rental than a full price purchase, and can easily leave you skipping half the book.

If you like some of the authors involved, or appreciate the idea of a take on Lovecraft which breaks away from the norm, this might be one for you. Otherwise, stick to some of the bigger success stories and adaptations of recent years.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

+++++ 4



PLANETFALL

AUTHOR: EMMA NEWMAN
PUBLISHER: ROC
RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 5TH

Emma Newman's *Planetfall* focuses on the story of Renata Ghali, a woman who followed cult leader Lee Suh-Mi into the

stars to find an alien world. She and her fellow travellers left a polluted, war-ruined Earth behind, believing that they could unlock the secrets of the universe. Twenty-two years have passed since they founded their colony on this distant planet, planting their base at the foot of a strange alien structure under strained circumstances. Life in the colony changes when a figure who could well be the son of Su-Mi arrives, someone who was clearly born on this world.

One of the things that science fiction does very well is provide a superb framework into which we can make even the most mundane story fantastic. The genre is rich in metaphor and this allows a skilled author to put many layers into the simplest stories, turning a tale of one personal tragedy into something

much deeper and more engaging. Newman's tale of secrets and distant alien worlds serves as a backdrop for a far darker and intensely personal tale. *Planetfall* is a science fiction novel that uses the future as a way of reminding us that people don't really change.

The main protagonist is a powerful and sympathetic character. Renata's skills primarily involve building and repairing things for the colony; she can manufacture whole organs using something akin to a 3D printer. Everyone in the colony has the best toys, from self-sustaining homes to mind implants that allow for a sort-of text message-based telepathy, and they have a peace of sorts. With the arrival of the stranger, however, things quickly unravel. The charming stranger throws

things into sharp focus and the lies and self-deceit that the colony is built on begin to reveal themselves.

Planetfall is a book about broken things; people, places, memories and dreams. It is no coincidence that the central character is responsible for repairs. She may have the power to change matter, but secrets and self-delusion have eaten away at this colony and the reasons behind this form much of the focus for the novel.

Planetfall is a gentle science fiction thriller that will draw you in slowly and shock you throughout. It's a powerful journey into the human psyche and one well worth the trip.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



PRICE OF VALOUR

AUTHOR: DJANGO WEXLER
PUBLISHER: DEL REY
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The world needs more flintlock fantasy novels, and Django Wexler certainly seems to be leading the charge. *The Price of Valour* is the third part of *The Shadow Campaigns*, a five book series. Whereas the first book was a thrill ride with little subtlety and the second one a little too focused on political machinations of the various factions, *The Price of Valour* seems to get the balance perfectly right.

With the King dead, the land of Vordan is at war. The morale of the populace is razor thin and Queen Raesinia Orboan is struggling to take control of her own court, with enemies and idiots at every turn. Determined to control the destiny of her own people, she takes control

rather abruptly. After a failed assassination attempt by her own people, she places her trust in the heroic soldier Marcus D'Ivoire, a fine fellow and the very figure of a doomed hero. The Queen has an ace or two up her sleeve, and the relationship between the hero and her highness is a delight.

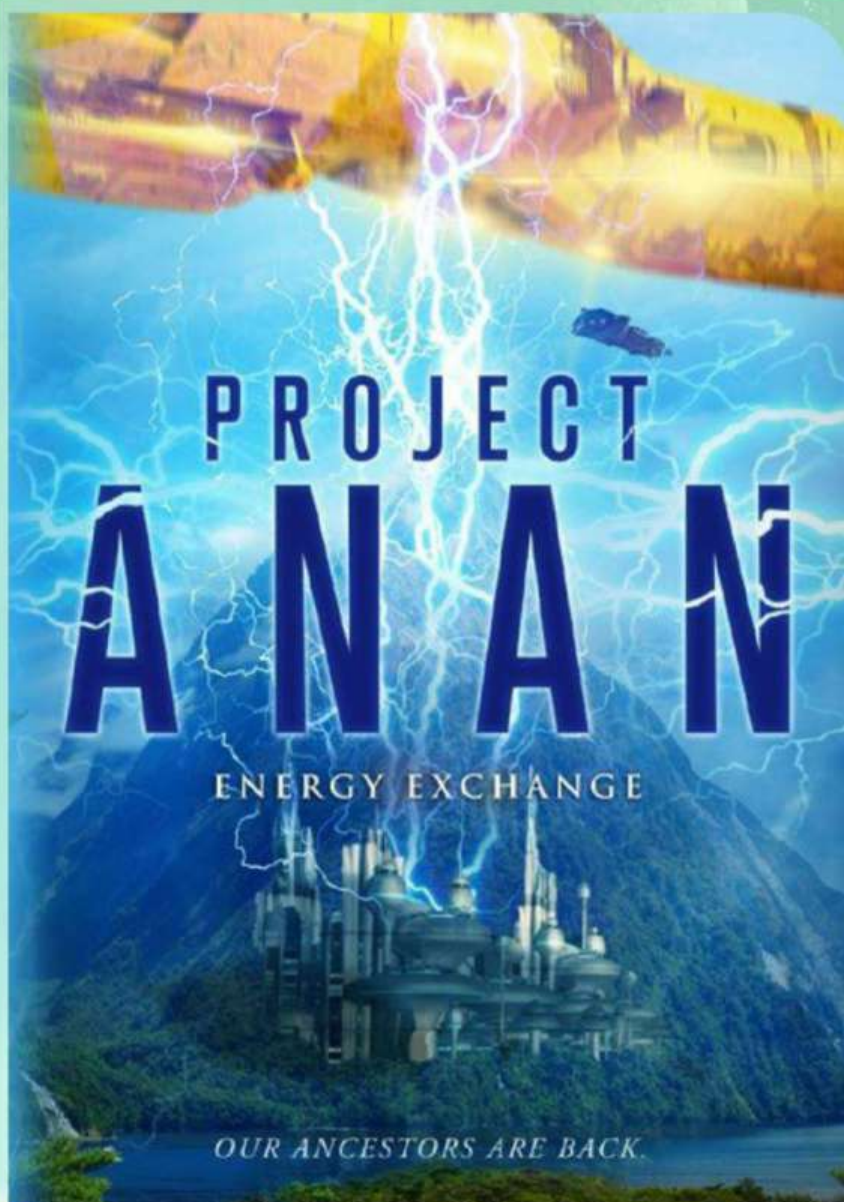
Meanwhile, Winter Ihernglass is back on the front lines, trying to protect those she loves whilst winning the war single handed. She has been promoted and given an all women regiment to command (which rather implies that someone knows the Winter is a woman disguised as a man). Still, her lover isn't helping her keep the secret. Meanwhile the gloriously crafty General Janus bet Vhalnich continues to gamble

with people's lives, and win.

Unluckily, for the Queen and her friends, the enemy has access to some pretty dark magic and a sinister cult of priests is popping up everywhere. The series so far has almost been low fantasy; in *The Price of Valour* Wexler turns up the volume of the magical elements to create something rather remarkable. This is pulp action with lots of intrigue and lots of fighting. Wexler has a very easy flowing style and a sing-song tone that makes it a pleasure to read. Once you get into the rhythm it's hard to put down. Recommended.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



INTERVIEW - LIONEL LAZARUS

Lionel Lazarus is a Dublin-based science fiction author who picked up his writing skills while working as a Toolpusher on the North Sea Rigs. His debut novel, *PROJECT ANAN*, is about the return of mankind's alien ancestors and their desperate search for life giving energy. We caught up with him to find out more...

STARBURST: What can you tell us about your book *Project Anan*?

Lionel Lazarus: It was an idea I had three years ago. How would aliens survive, what are their energy needs. What would they make of Earth if they came from here and returned? The book starts in New Zealand, which is where the aliens came from before. The book is written as a project the aliens embark on with the humans.

It's about aliens. It's about people on Earth. What our origins are. How they came back to Earth and what their wants and needs.

How influenced where you by the whole God is an astronaut subgenre?

I wasn't influenced at all by that, I'm not into those subgenres. I would have gone off into a different journey in that respect.

Why are we fascinated with aliens?

I have always been enthralled with science fiction. I'm fascinated with our development as a species and if you look at our history they are great leaps forward at certain times. Did someone intervene at some point, where does our intelligence come from? I think when you look up at

the stars and you try and imagine the size of the universe, that's where it all comes from.

Who are your influences?

Frank Herbert. The storyline, the epic scale, the genre itself just caught my imagination and never let go. Frank Herbert influenced my reading habits at a young age. When it comes to writing, I have to say it's Ken Follett, he really stimulated my imagination.

Why self-publishing?

It was the most independent method I could find. I had the story, but going around knocking on the doors of publisher was always going to be a very difficult task, especially in Ireland. The people who influenced me to write the most were online indie authors. I would download seven books and read them in two weeks, and mostly they were indie authors. That really forced me down the route and made me go that way.

What's next?

Project Anan is out and being an indie author I have to do the marketing. Book Two of *Project Anan* is very much on its way. It is 20% done. It's set mostly in space, the first one is pretty much set on Earth. I've been getting on with the next book.

Are we in a Golden Age of Science Fiction?

I have been reading science fiction since I could pick up a book and it's always been part of my literary diet. Are we in a golden age now? I look at my son and his room is full of *Star Wars* LEGO. He and his friends are very much into it all and they go to all the comic cons they can. I think if we are in a golden age then it has only just begun. Why is that? I just think it's such a fantastic wide open genre and they are no limits?

Why are the aliens the way they are in *Project Anan*?

At the beginning of the book, I asked where do we come from? These aliens are our relations, they are an earlier race. If you go to what the anthropologist's say we're going to look like in the future, they project we will get taller with longer necks and limbs. If you're talking about the other aliens in the book, then you're talking about trying to conceptualise and perceive beings of pure energy.

What is your favourite book of all time?

It's Ken Follett's world without end. The story is fantastic and he just sucks you in and never stops.

If you could write like anyone in the world, who would it be?

I think I would like to write like James Clavell, who wrote *Tai-Pan* and *King Rat*. It just flows and is such a pleasure to read.

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

PROJECT ANAN is out now. It can be ordered and downloaded via lionellazarus.com.

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM
THE WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS



Avengers and collectable lunchboxes can rejoice, as the oft-neglected Black Widow is set to get her own ongoing series, helmed by the acclaimed *Daredevil* team of Mark Waid and Chris Samnee. Said to be an old school spy tale, it'll give Natasha access to plenty of fun gadgets and toys, presumably leaving most of the I'm a monster talk and silly MCU Hulk romance at the door. *Black Widow* will launch in 2016; guns, gadgets, toys and all.

From Black Widows to Panthers (how's that for a segue?) roughly in time for his *Captain America: Civil War* appearance, Marvel's most famous Wakandan will be getting his own book. The 12-part series hopes to 'redefine' Black Panther as a superhero and a king (or simply define, if this is your first exposure to the character prior to his movie debut). The book will be written by journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates and illustrated by Brian Stelfreeze. It's due for release in 2016, just in time for his *Civil War* appearance.

And the segues just keep coming. As Spider-Man is set to make his MCU debut in *Civil War*, so we've heard news that occasional wife, girlfriend (depending on which timeline we're looking at, and whether they've been divorced by a deal with the devil) and supermodel Mary Jane Watson (or Parker... it's hard to keep track these days) will be joining Tony Stark in the pages of *Invincible Iron Man*. To what end? Marvel are keeping tight-lipped there, but we'll find out in December, when MJ is set to join the cast. Face it, tiger (Tony the tiger! Geddit?) you've just hit... well, you know the rest.

DC time, and we reported last month of the emergence of variant covers for Frank Miller's imminent *Dark Knight Returns* sequel *The Master Race*. Well, more have since popped up to pique your curiosity. Many more, including work by Neal Adams, Brian Bolland and Darwyn Cooke, among (lots of) others. They mostly consist of re-staged images from *The Dark Knight Returns*, but are entirely worth it for Andy Kubert's hilarious and cheeky rendition of Batman's 'operating table' moment. That's not all either – the book's first panel has also been released, illustrated by Kubert and Klaus Janson, depicting a Batsuit in a glass case. Ominous. *The Master Race* is scheduled for release on November 25th, by which time we will hopefully be finally convinced that it is, after all, definitely a real thing.

Also a real thing: *Batman* 66 and his increasingly silly crossovers and adventures. He didn't quite meet The

Do you have a moment to talk about comics? It's that time again, faithful readers, to delve into the long box and take a look at the latest goings-on in the various universes therein. As you might expect during the preamble to the Most Wonderful Time of the Year (no,

not that one... Halloween, silly!) we'll be keeping our eye out for whatever wicked might this way come. But, equal opportunities as we are, I'm sure that silly Archie Andrews bastard will probably pop up somewhere along the way too.

But first – happier news! Fans of the

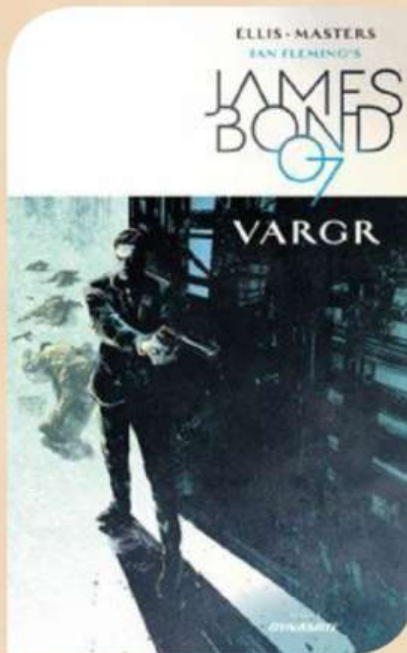


Avengers (because it was the British TV Avengers, Steed and Peel, geddit?) and now Batman is not quite meeting Superman in a crossover with *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (because Henry Cavill is in the movie reboot, geddit?). Okay, one imagines that it's more likely to be the original telly incarnation rather than Cavill, but the link is too cheeky to pass up without comment. The plot? As criminal association T.H.R.U.S.H. begins recruiting its members from Gotham City's not inconsiderable talent pool, so Batman and Robin are forced to investigate, joining forces with agents Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin to thwart the organisation's nefarious plans. *Batman 66 Meets The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* this December, and will be written by series regular Jeff Parker.

That's not all the spy news either - In November, Warren Ellis will head up *James Bond 007* for Dynamite Comics. This coincides quite nicely with the release of cinematic Bond's latest adventure, and will mark Ellis's first time writing 007. No Daniel Craig though - his Bond will deliver the 'brutal, damaged' spy of Ian Fleming's novels. Launching with a six-issue arc, we'll see Bond travel from Helsinki to London to Berlin on a very Bond-sounding mission of vengeance.

And yet, no horror! I've been looking, alright! With not much to talk of among the Big Two (aside from the return of Ultimate Reed Richards, wielding a scalpel) the scares come from the relative Indies, most notably in the return of a major horror franchise to the world of funnybooks.

Yes, *Night of the Living Dead* is set to live again (groan) in not one, but two new series from newbie publisher Double Take. How did they manage to get hold of such a prestigious title? Romero's zombie classic is public domain, more or less anyone is free to resurrect the franchise as they see fit. *Rise* and *Z-Men* have launched just



in time for Halloween, with the former dealing with the continuing adventures of Johnny and Barbara. *Z-Men*, meanwhile, will handle the aftermath (presumably opening with nobody noticing that they accidentally shot Ben in the head) as two secret service agents investigate Romero's zombie apocalypse.

In even unlikelier adaptation news, there's the story that the infamous comic book-ruining work by Doctor Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (he was responsible for the Comics Code and the decline of EC Horror Comics) is to serve as inspiration for a true crime series - of which Doctor Wertham most decidedly wouldn't approve. To debut in December from Dynamite, *Seduction of the Innocent* will follow an unwitting young FBI agent as he tackles a serial killer in 1953 San Francisco. Andre Parks and Esteve Polls will serve as creative duo on the book, which should no doubt have the infamous prude turning in his grave.



Whatever next, a video nasty inspired by the rantings of Mary Whitehouse?

Still, all that and no pumpkins or ghouls. Well, at least IDW Comics are getting into the spirit of things. In news that will scare nobody but me, we have my worst nightmare coming true - Archie Cover Month! That's a month (no duh) of covers celebrating 75 years of the all-American teenager, and will depict the kid meeting all of IDW's properties. Keep an eye out for Archie on the covers of *Transformers*, *Super Angry Birds*, *Empire: Uprising* (no idea, sorry), *Jem & The Holograms*, *Back to the Future*, *The X-Files* (going with Sabrina the Teenage Witch on the cover, which at least works), *Star Trek* and... *Judge Dredd*. The covers will be released this December.

Cue the Wilhelm Scream!

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



TMNT VOLUME 12: VENGEANCE PART 1

WRITER: TOM WALTZ / ARTIST: MATEUS SANTOLOUÇO / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 22ND

IDW's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles series has been very good thus far. This is because IDW have worked with Kevin Eastman to stitch together all the various ideas from the franchise to bring the entire thing into a living, breathing mythos. In fact, the only thing it doesn't draw any ideas from is the Michael Bay movie. Which makes sense, as it was rubbish.

The previous volume completed the major plot arc of the entire series, the invasion of Earth by Krang. On the way, we've learned that Shredder is kind of immortal, that the Turtles themselves are the reincarnated spirits of long dead ninjas, that demon gods plot to take over the world, and that the streets of New York have pretty weird beasts roaming around, including mutant foxes, cyborg fly monsters and a power-armoured kick-ass vigilante. The last book felt like a season finale, with some rather shocking revelations that looked to change the Turtles forever. This meant that TMNT Volume 12: Vengeance Part 1 needed to be a strong season opener.

Fortunately, it is. Some of the nastier consequences of the previous book have

been dealt with satisfactorily, though not in a particularly franchise-altering way. Of particular note is the growth of Alopex and Raphael. It makes sense that the two loners would have the most interesting set pieces and it's nice to see these. The book is slightly disrupted by the addition of a story so far strip in the middle (it's from a Free Comic Book Day giveaway), though it's also kind of useful; we are onto Volume 12, after all.

The strong themes of family and growing up are continued throughout, and the various character motifs (including Splinter's constant battle with traps) continue. There's a real sense of love to this series; from the intricate artwork, to the carefully worked out character development, the amount of work that has gone into what many dismiss as a silly 90s gimmick is incredible. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Volume 12: Vengeance Part 1 is a great addition to what is fast becoming the definitive version of the series, and we can't wait to see Part 2.

ED FORTUNE



THE FLASH: SEASON ZERO

WRITER: ANDREW KREISBERG / ARTIST: PHIL HESTER, ERIC GAPSTUR / PUBLISHER: DC COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Having wowed audiences with its debut year, The CW's Flash finds itself the focus of this DC Comics trade paperback, collecting the twelve-issue digital run that began earlier in the year. Picking things up with Barry Allen at various points that coincide with the show's first season, we get to take a look at the Scarlet Speedster getting accustomed to his powers as he tackles some familiar DC rogues whilst delving deeper into the mystery of who killed his mother.

First off, this comic book tale will instantly grab the attention for its lighter tone and approach to The Flash and his supporting characters. Sure, the TV show that it's based on is quite often vibrant and elaborate, but the funny book format allows for things to become more outlandish in the sense of what villains are incorporated and just how said villains look. By that, we mean that the characters on show here look as if, yes, they've been pulled straight from a comic book, which deviates the story just enough from The CW's show that it gives the book a sense of its own identity whilst also keeping the fun of the Grant Gustin-starring series.

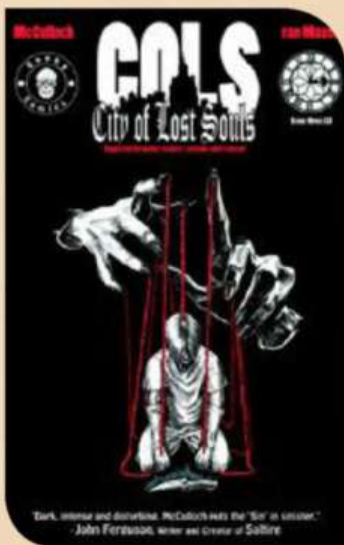
As Barry is finding his feet as a hero, we get to see him tangle with the newly-created Mr. Bliss and his tormented, twisted circus, not to mention DC mainstays such as King Shark and the Suicide Squad, plus there's the teaming up with certain old friends. With the fluid, casual art style incorporated, the story

flows perfectly and brings a different side to the character and world that we've enjoyed so much on our television screens.

Sure, there may not be anything of great consequence in this outing, but it's just like its television accompaniment: enjoyable. The colours, elaborate costumes and cheesy dialogue all work as both a great standalone read and as an enjoyable side dish to The CW's Flash show. If there's any slight gripe, it's the mish-mash of a timeline that seems to set the book at jumbled, varying times throughout the show's first season. But still, this is only a minor issue in an otherwise vastly fun read.

ANDREW POLLARD





CITY OF LOST SOULS #3

WRITER: JAMES MCCULLOCH / ARTIST: JANINE VAN MOESEL / PUBLISHER: MOOMAC COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dead serial killer Matt takes a detour from his quest to find the mythical City of Lost Souls and free himself from the ghosts of those he murdered. After being forced to relive the rage and anguish of one of his victims, and subsequently becoming guided by a

flickering shadow of something that might have once been a sense of responsibility, he undertakes to hunt down those the grieving father was about to exact vengeance upon before being killed.

Meanwhile, we learn that Matt's mad midget guide Ki actually has a life of his own outside of shepherding clueless spirits through their own personal purgatories, and in the process we gain some insight into the machinations of the soul collector who set Matt on his search. There is much more going on than we're being told, and it's wonderfully difficult to predict exactly what's going to happen because of it.

The separation of the characters into several smaller groups better allows their individual personalities to come through, and we get to know more about several of Matt's ghostly entourage as their interactions with one another flesh them out and allow them to be seen as real people, rather than just the numbers carved into their flesh that he reduced them to in death.

As the body count begins to rack up, you start to wonder if Matt's new path as an undead avenger is merely the flipside of his rampage as a serial killer, as each appears to be fuelled by his desire for an excuse to kill people. Robbed of his belief that the murder victims who now haunt him were deserving of the violent ends he inflicted upon them, his unslakeable bloodlust constantly drives him to seek out more deserving prey, each

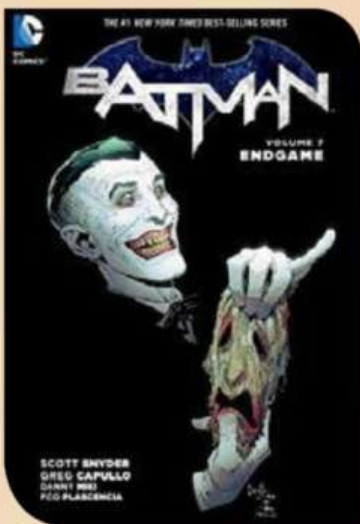
passing moment seeming to further erode his already questionable sanity.

Although *City of Lost Souls* unflinchingly showcases the utter nadir of human nature in bursts of brutal fury, the dialogue manages to mine a vein of dark humour that prevents it becoming too disheartening, while the artwork continues to delight in the gleeful depravity of onomatopoeic viscera. In this issue there is more blood and chaos than the first two combined, culminating in eight pages of unadulterated carnage that, at its climax, strongly suggests that, in Matt, the soul collectors have unleashed a death-dealing juggernaut upon both the spirit realm and the seedy underbelly of the mortal world, and one that might be more than even they can handle.

ANDREW MARSHALL



9



BATMAN VOLUME 7: ENDGAME

WRITER: SCOTT SNYDER / ARTIST: GREG CAPULLO / PUBLISHER: DC COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In this highly anticipated sequel to the acclaimed *Death of the Family* storyline, Batman's archenemy The Joker makes his return after his long disappearance. For many years, he regarded Batman with a sick, twisted love, thinking that one could never exist without the other, and last time he struck, he tried to prove this by killing Batman's family. But thanks to Batman's rejection, that's all changed now. Now the Clown Prince of Crime is done playing; he

now hates Batman and is determined to kill him, and he's going to do it using those who Batman loves the most, including the entire Bat-Family and the Justice League. With the outbreak of a deadly viral outbreak and nowhere left to run, Batman is now determined to put an end to The Joker's final joke once and for all, even if it costs him his own life.

Many superb writers have always explored the dichotomy between Batman and Joker in great and memorable detail over the years, like Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Paul Dini and Frank Miller. What Scott Snyder did with it in the *Death of the Family* storyline was unique and played up to the villain's psychology and strengths, and with *Endgame* Snyder tries to look at that relationship in a new light, showing that Joker has now gone from loving to hating Batman. This is heavily highlighted through Joker's dialogue and his extremely violent (and gory) approach to Batman and his allies, whereas before he was just attacking them psychologically. This plays up more to the Joker's murderous side, and the gruesome acts he performs wouldn't look too out of place in a slasher film, particularly in the climactic showdown. Like in *Death of the Family*, the characterisation of the Joker is masterful and definitely has flashes of Mark Hamill's iconic portrayal; his scarred face and demonic body language make him a more frightening figure than ever, and this is all down to Greg Capullo's stunning artwork that looks weirdly unsettling whenever Joker comes into panel.

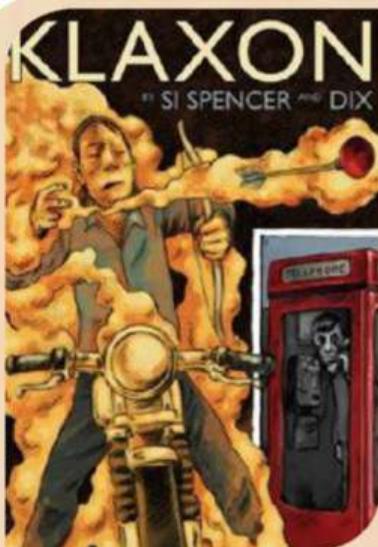
What's brilliant about Joker is that he's a complete enigma and his origins are steeped in mystery, yet like Batman he's human without any superpowers. However, with *Endgame*, Snyder tries to give him a seemingly definitive supernatural origin story that sadly conflicts things by giving Joker superpowers. He's centuries old, immortal and cannot be killed now! This is Joker, not Rasmal Ghul! Yes, it's all implied and will certainly be immediately retconned sooner rather than later, yet it would have been better for this immortal angle to have been left out completely. Also, the resolutions to the problems Batman encounters throughout the storyline involving the Justice League and the Court of Owls are never properly explored and are all resolved quickly off panel.

If *Endgame* is indeed the end to Snyder and Capullo's Joker story, then this saga ended on a surprising note. While the scenes that focus on Batman's other sidekicks and villains are underdeveloped, its focus on the Batman/Joker rivalry is certainly an enthralling read. With the writing solid (for the most part) and the artwork beautiful, the creators have successfully painted an unsettling, bloody and very dramatic portrait of two old enemies locked in one last, desperate battle for the fate of Gotham, even if it ultimately isn't the strongest of Joker stories.

RYAN POLLARD



7



KLAXON

WRITER: SI SPENCER / ARTIST: DIX GRIM /
PUBLISHER: SELFMADEHERO / RELEASE DATE:
OCTOBER 15TH

This new trade paperback by Si Spencer and Dix could potentially be the strangest graphic novel you will ever read. The simplicity and the utter madness that creates this graphic novel could have made this a terrible read. But instead, Si Spencer and Dix manage to create a story that can be read in a quick sitting and will get readers asking what the hell is going on?

The story follows Carlisle, who sits around getting high all day with his friends. The story starts off gloomy, but when new neighbours arrive next door, Carlisle decides to leave the house and to try and help out. This gets the attention of Mr. Stapleton, the landlord, who is the most absurd character you are ever likely to come across. This is then followed by the strangest occurrences to ever take place in a graphic novel.

Throughout Klaxon, great emphasis is put on the artwork to carry the story, and with the drugged-up storyline this actually works. Dialogue is used sparsely, only enhancing the disturbing atmosphere that is already created. The artwork is crucial to telling the story and really allows for the reader's imagination to be captured through the use

of some bizarre occurrences.

The great thing about this graphic novel is that it is just such a simple story full of originality, but the strange occurrences make it a very amusing read. It is very much a horror story, but it is told in such a way with occurrences that just aren't explained, it becomes a very humorous tale. Klaxon is a very quick read with very little dialogue involved, but the nightmarish humour mixed with a bizarre story allows for one of the best original graphic novels this year. A quick bizarre read where you'll question what was going on right up until the end.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★★★9



RAGNAROK VOLUME 1: LAST GOD STANDING

WRITER & ARTIST: WALTER SIMONSON /
PUBLISHER: IDW PUBLISHING / RELEASE DATE:
NOVEMBER 12TH

It took Walter Simonson 15 years, but he finally got round to his creator-owned comic book of Norse mythology and fantasy, Ragnarok. Simonson has changed up the myth with a dark twist. Set in a world where the bad guys have won, the Norse world and the Gods have long been destroyed. Except for Thor, who has been missing for three-hundred hundred years, absent from the great battle that destroyed his home

and family. Now he has awoken with his lower jaw missing and his skin rotted. Zombie Thor! On discovering the great enemy Surtar is in power having won the war, his previous life has been shattered. No family, no home, thus Thor promises revenge. An undead thunder God out for blood in a medieval fantastical world - what more could you want from an adventure comic?

Having had an incredible run on Marvel's Thor plus having expert knowledge of Norse mythology, there really is no other comic creator better qualified than Walter Simonson for this glorious saga that is Ragnarok. Simonson's work on Marvel's Thor was magnificent; it has set the bar for himself and for Norse mythos in comic fiction, and so this puts a lot of pressure to deliver. As a creator-owned work, it makes it rather risky with such high expectations. Alas, there is no fret here as Simonson has created a story so exciting and so fresh that you can't really compare it to his other work other than by saying he has made yet another awesome comeback. Without overdoing it, Simonson has created some brilliant dynamics to the story, making this book truly compelling.

The beautiful traditional craftsmanship in narrative suits the fantasy/adventure style. From Simonson's line art to John Workman's lettering with onomatopoeia splashing across the pages, the energy is palpable. Workman has collaborated with Simonson on many occasions, and his lettering alone has left a distinctive mark on their work together. Simonson's collaboration with colourist Laura Martin also brings the art alive with such vibrancy, adding wonderful hues of colour to his scratchy line work. Some really awesome and innovative touches fill the pages throughout, especially in battle

and confrontation scenes, making them brutal yet entertaining. We also see Mjlnir do a lot of smashing, which is always fun.

There is also still a sense of heroism to this story; despite Thor's raging lust for vengeance and the trail of destruction he leaves behind, the God of Thunder still vows to protect the mortal humans made slaves in this new world. The story intensifies as significant characters are introduced then dropped unexpectedly. As the overarching story develops, there is a subplot developing causing apprehension as the audience grow to favour two important characters that will inevitably come to an epic confrontation. Hopefully the next run won't be so drawn-out and the wait will be shorter, as we're left in suspense to discover what will become of Thor.

SAMANTHA WARD

★★★★★★★★★10



REALLY FUNNY, SHARP, SMART
AND LOOKS GREAT!
ROB WILLIAMS
(2000AD, MARTIAN MANHUNTER)

JAW-DROPPINGLY BEAUTIFUL... IF
IT'S NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT
SERIES OF RECENT TIMES, IT'S
CERTAINLY THE MOST AMBITIOUS
STARBURST MAGAZINE

AN EARLY FRONT RUNNER FOR MY
BREAK-OUT INDIE OF THE YEAR
COMIC BASTARDS

A PRIMAL SCREAM BURSTING TO
GET THROUGH THE PAGES
GEEK SYNDICATE

UTTERLY FLAWLESS STUFF...THE
VERY DEFINITION OF A 'CAN'T
MISS' TITLE
BIG COMIC PAGE

I THINK THIS COMIC IS PLANNING
TO KILL ME
MINDLESS ONES

A TRUE CLASSIC IN THE MAKING
BOOKMUNCH

A STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL
WORK...COULD WELL BE BE THE
UK COMIC OF THE YEAR
COMICS ALLIANCE

A TENSE, INTRIGUING PLOT THAT
PROMISES FIREWORKS...THIS IS A
COMIC THAT CLEARLY HAS
SOMETHING TO SAY
BLEEDING COOL

REALLY STRONG CHRIS MORRIS-Y
BLACK COMEDY. GET!
KIERON GILLEN
(THE WICKED + THE DIVINE)

BEAST WAGON

OWEN MICHAEL JOHNSON // JOHN PEARSON // COLIN BELL

C H A P T E R T W O

ON SALE NOVEMBER // CHAPTER ONE AVAILABLE NOW



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WHAT IS LAPTOP GUY?

WORDS JACK LOTHIAN // ART SHA NAZIR
FOLLOW US ON TWITTER @BHPCOMICS

WHAT IS LAPTOP GUY?

LAPTOP GUY
IS A FINANCIAL AND
ARTISTIC FAILURE.

I HAVE NO IDEA.

OH WAIT. IS
THAT THE TERRIBLE
COMIC BOOK SHA MADE
THAT NOBODY
LIKED?

YES.
LAPTOP GUY IS
MY COMIC.

HE STOLE
IDEA FROM
ME.

I DIDN'T STEAL THE IDEA FROM
RAUL. HE GOT THAT INTO HIS
HEAD WHEN HE WAS ON **STRONG**
MEDICATION AFTER HE CUT HIS
OWN ARM OFF BUT IT'S NOT
TRUE. WELL, NOT REALLY...

HOLD ON, YOU CUT YOUR OWN ARM OFF..?!

IT WAS **INDUSTRIAL**
ACCIDENT. I STILL WAIT FOR
COMPENSATION.

I REGRET
NOTHING.

WE'RE NOT
PAYING ANY
COMPENSATION.

EVEN WORSE I HAD TO GO AND
SNEAK IN AND RECOVER HIS ARM
FROM THE **HOSPITAL** SO WE COULD
GIVE IT A PROPER
BURIAL.

BUT IT WAS **NOT** MY ARM. IT WAS
SOMEONE ELSE'S.

THESE WERE
GOOD TIMES.

SORRY- STILL NOT TOTALLY
CLEAR ON WHO LAPTOP GUY IS..?

HE'S JUST A
FICTIONAL CHARACTER.

HE'S
DEFINITELY NOT A
FIGMENT OF MY
IMAGINATION THAT
HAUNTS MY EVERY
WAKING HOUR.



HE'S
STANDING RIGHT
BEHIND ME,
ISN'T HE?



IF IT
HELPS, JUST THINK OF
ME AS A LOVEABLE
HOBBS TO HIS ODDBALL
CALVIN.



I FEEL BAD FOR MR. SHA. HE PUT ALL
HIS LIFE SAVINGS INTO MAKING SILLY
COMIC ABOUT MAN WITH LAPTOP FOR
HEAD, BUT NOBODY BUYS IT, AND THEN
HE HAS- HOW YOU SAY- AN EPIC
BREAKDOWN, YES?



WHAT?
RAUL SAID THAT?
NO.
I DIDN'T HAVE
A BREAKDOWN.



LOOK - A WISE MAN ONCE SAID THAT
THE THINGS THAT THE THINGS THAT
HAPPEN IN OUR DREAMS, IN OUR
IMAGINATION, THEY'RE MORE REAL
AND MORE MEANINGFUL THAN THOSE
THAT HAPPEN IN OUR WAKING
HOURS.

SO IN A WAY,
Y'KNOW...
I'M LUCKY.



WAIT, DID
HE SAY HE
WAS LUCKY?

JUST
SMILE AND
NOD. TRY NOT TO
MAKE EYE
CONTACT.



I THINK
I'M NOT QUITE
SELLING
YOU ON THIS. MAYBE I
SHOULD START AGAIN
FROM THE
TOP...



THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED LAPTOP GUY SEASON ONE
NOW AVAILABLE, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN WAGNE

ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY ROUND
UP FROM THE
WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA WITH
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



KUROKO'S BASKETBALL Anime Movie in Production

Anyone looking to get their sports on will be happy at the prospect of a **Kuroko's Basketball** anime being in the works. The announcement was made amidst KUROBAS CUP 2015, which boasted performances from OLD CODEX and the voice cast of the TV anime. No dates have yet been revealed.

SAZAE-SAN Voice Actress Retires After 46 Years

Clocking 46 years on the world's longest-running animated TV show is worthy of retirement in our books, so it's with a celebratory tone that we bring you news that voice actress Miyoko Asō has retired from playing Fune Isono on **Sazae-san**. By the time you read this, Miyoko's last episodes will have already aired in Japan. At 89 years old, and with acting credits that include **Full Metal Alchemist**, we wish Asō a very happy retirement.

Production I.G Delve into Virtual Reality

If any film is deserving of the virtual reality treatment, it's **Ghost in the Shell**. Twenty years on from its cinematic debut, and that dream has become reality. Studio Production I.G has announced plans to enter the VR content market with its app, called **Kōkaku Kidōtai Shin Gekijō-ban Virtual Reality Diver (Ghost in the Shell: The New Movie Virtual Reality Diver)**. Used in conjunction with an Oculus Rift, the app offers an original story in 360° 3D video. It might only be 10 minutes, but 10 minutes of immersive **Ghost in the Shell** action is better than none.



Kickstarter Seeks to Localise MUV-LUV Visual Novel

Working in tandem, publisher Degica and developer Ixtl have launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise the funds necessary to localise the **Muv-Luv** visual novel and **Muv-Luv Alternative** sequel in English. If funds are met, the twin companies will distribute the PC version of the games through Steam and similar services. At the time of going to print, the campaign had almost doubled its goal of \$250,000. It ends on November 3rd, with **Muv-Luv** slated for March of next year and **Alternative** in summer.

WEEKLY SHONEN JUMP Now Available Through comiXology and Kindle

Given its hefty back catalogue, it's been long wondered whether Viz Media would make its raft of back issues available independent of its own Android app. Good news then, as the publisher has taken its first tentative steps into cross-platform availability, after launching its **Weekly Shonen Jump** magazine through the Amazon-owned comiXology and the Kindle Store. It's especially good news for UK fans, who will now be able to enjoy the English language manga to their hearts' content.

Rumblings of a Live Action AKIRA Again

Okay, so you've probably already heard the news that Warner Bros. is contemplating a live-action **Akira** trilogy. The long gestating do-over is even believed to have been offered to Hollywood hotshot Christopher Nolan. It's also believed that Marco J. Ramirez (**Sons of Anarchy** and **Daredevil** S2 showrunner) will be on scriptwriting duties. We're in two minds, but if anyone can turn out a decent adaptation then Nolan can, right? [Are you sure? Ed]

PERSONA 5 to get Anime Special

Although **Persona 5** has been delayed until summer next year, breaking fans' hearts worldwide, there is some small concession in the form of an anime special. Unveiled at Tokyo Game Show 2015, the anime will be produced by Atlus. Though details are pretty sparse on the ground, just the announcement was enough to get us excited.

CHARLOTTE OVA in the Works

Despite the wonky end to the series, **Charlotte** has captured the imagination and proved to be a hit in the summer season, not least for bringing together writer Jun Maeda and character designer Na-Ga again. It's hardly a surprise, then, that an OVA is on its way. The unaired thirteenth episode, titled **Record of the Future**, will be released with Volume 7 come March 2016.

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



BLEACH: SERIES 16 PART 2

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NORIYUKI ABE / SCREENPLAY: MASASHI SOGO / STARRING: FUMIKO ORIKASA, MASAKAZU MORITA, AKIO OHTSUKA, ATSUKO YUYA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As the Soul Society was all but bereft in the first curve, it's gratifying to catch up with the Soul Reaper's shenanigans. And all's well and merry on New Year's Eve as the Soul Reapers fly kites. But even that turns into a hotbed of competition and one-upmanship. Rukia, on the other hand, has to deal with a more personal plight than the world hanging in the

balance or umpteen hollows to contend with.

When the narrative does catch up with Ichigo again, he's still in the thick of it, vigorously training and honing his fullbring ability opposite ruthless sensei, Kūgo Ginjō. Some of these scenes are particularly eye-wincing - sometimes literally - and even by Bleach standards, the entire arc flings about the bloodshed

with abandon.

Since losing his powers 17 months before and having to cope with life as a normal, Ichigo has been putting in the hard slog and sharpening his innate ability to tool himself as a hollow slayer again. His powers are put to the test by having to routinely fend off Shūkurō Tsukishima, who deals in memory and manipulation. As far as Bleach baddies go, he's fairly bland. After the curtain falls on the obligatory twists, he's a lot more fallible, but since this is, for all intents and purposes, the last huzzah, he's a bit lacklustre.

Where the villain loses is only Ichigo's gain. The episodes take time to explore his mental state, and the growing effect of creeping paranoia and instability. The fatigue of his excursions on his mental wellbeing was never an overwhelming concern, but when the memories of his friends and family have been drastically altered, Ichigo

reaches breaking point. If the entire 16-series run was a character study, then this final curve was the apotheosis.

There's some spectacular combat in tow, the like of which we haven't quite seen before in the clashes between Soul Reapers and the fullbringers. The last episode, aptly, is a convergence of style, sound and splendour that is the essence of Bleach distilled.

But in amongst the action and mental fatigue is a real sense of retrospect and generational divides. It's an ending steeped in nostalgia and optimism, and one that quietly bids farewell to a show that ran for almost ten years. This isn't necessary the end, but for now, this quietly unassuming swansong is all we've got.

Extras: Opening and closing animations

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★ 8



NARUTO: SHIPPEDN COLLECTION 22

BD + DVD / CERT: 12 / CREATOR: MASASHI KISHIMOTO / STARRING: JUNKO TAKEUCHI, CHIE NAKAMURA, KAZUHIKO INOUE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Opener Road to Sakura is little more than a tie-in episode for Road to Ninja: Naruto the Movie; there's even a promotional poster in one scene. It has no bearing on the following episodes, but is a nice enough preface, with a confused Sakura struggling with apparent memory loss.

The rest continues the Fourth Shinobi World War: Confrontation arc and the hard slog against the Impure World Reincarnation. Dead shinobi are still on the rise, proving that no one ever really stays deceased in shonen. It does undermine the power of their original deaths, particularly

with the frequent flashbacks to spin the yarn of their passing. But after learning the truth, and striking out to save his friends, the episodes shift into gear and demonstrate just how powerful Naruto has become. Little wonder, then, that the most engaging and entertaining action sequences are those involving a glowing Naruto and Killer Bee giving it what for.

Sandwiched between the hinterlands of scattered fight scenes are some tender reveries and moving revelations. Choji, Shikamaru and Ino, for example, are forced to clash with their former sensei, Asuma Sarutobi. Likewise, when the politics and subtlety of warfare shines through the big brawls, it's a lot more interesting. Still blissfully unaware of the war, Killer Bee steps up Naruto's training for some psychedelic scenes. The back and forth between Naruto and the nine-tailed fox is especially dynamic in showing the inner struggle and temptation Naruto

has had to deal with all his life. But he discovers that the demon isn't all eat and maim, rather it's a pipeline to his parents. On the same note, the lid is blown off Killer Bee's past and underneath every fool, you fool, is an intricate and charming character.

Fans of the original Naruto series will be pleased as there are so many flashbacks to that time; one episode is even a clip show. It's also plain to see that despite the wobbly quality of the animation, it has stepped up, with many of the character models undergoing refinement around the edges, particularly Sakura.

It might not quite be filler, but Collection 22 possesses more than a little padding. In amongst all the chaos and calamity, the moral, as ever, is that friendship trumps all.

Extras: Storyboards and trailers.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★ 6



NORAGAMI: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KOTARO TAMURA / SCREENPLAY: DEKO AKAO / STARRING: HIROSHI KAMIYA, YUUKI KAJI, ASAMI IMAI, AKI TOYOSAKI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Noragami is a series where phantoms flock to seismic emotions and the conflict of adolescence is a melting pot of anger, frustration and hormonal angst, making the high school setting wholly justified. The fact it's exam week only makes the stress and anxiety that much more delectable.

Yato brilliantly voiced by Hiroshi Kamiya - is a frustrated up-and-coming demi-god lacking a shrine

but packing a finely honed sense of bad boy street cred. In his tracksuit, bandit scarf and boots, he cuts a striking figure, though less divine and more ragamuffin. After slaying a phantom that's prowling around the school, his regalia a bound spirit halfway between a weapon and assistant unceremoniously resigns.

Desperate to earn enough cash to build his own bountiful shrine, Yato takes on odd jobs

for a five yen reward. Without a regalia to hand, that aim becomes a lot more difficult. Nevertheless, he takes on a wish to find a missing cat by the name of Milord. Cosmic fate has him cross paths with Hiyori Iki, a martial arts otaku and high school student.

Following a near-death experience trying to save Yato from an oncoming bus, Hiyori gets trapped somewhere between the near shore and the far the twin planes of existence. Consequently, her spirit is prone to ditching her body like narcolepsy of the soul. As a living phantom, she's a walking target. Once the duo come up against a patricianly insistent phantom, Yato finds his new regalia in the form of Yukine - voiced by the consistently great Yūki Kaji - an angst-ridden fourteen year old spirit, and then the family unit is complete. The trouble is, Yukine isn't much of a fan of Yato's lifestyle as a down and out vagrant deity.

The presence of the phantoms is prefigured by trippy visuals of bulging eyes against blood red and bruised purple backdrops. It brings home just how effortlessly

Japanese animation can conjure a sense of terror and otherness. The phantoms themselves are neon-coloured creatures with either an aquatic, amphibian or insectoid physiology. As if in keeping with the enemy, the music is every bit as barmy. With evocative ambience conjuring Angelo Badalamenti, strung together with whiffs of new age and grime for a cool urban swagger.

As a metaphor for depression and anxiety, Noragami is a runaway success. Yet it also explores themes of friendship and parental relations in a sensitive and arresting way. The combat scenes and attention to environment showcase the remarkable animation, but it's the central trio that tug most on the heartstrings. It might cost you more than five yen a pop, but you'll want to be cosmically bound to it nonetheless.

Extras: Commentary / Textless opening and closing / Trailers

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

+++++++ 9



DRAGON BALL Z KAI: SEASON TWO

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: YASUHIRO NOWATARI / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: MASAKO NOZAWA, HIKARU MIDORIKAWA, HIROKO EMORI, HIROMI TSURU / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The reverence of Dragon Ball Z elevates it beyond humble animation and into the annals of televisual greatness, where it simultaneously speaks for the genre and stands apart. To commemorate the twentieth anniversary back in 2009, the series was literally taken back to the drawing board, where filler was edited out, the animation was scrubbed up and some new vocals were added for an end result more in keeping with Akira Toriyama's manga series. Now it's enjoying a steady distribution

in Blighty from the good folk over at Manga UK.

Looking back, it's easy to see how big a part nostalgia had to play in its adoration. It's not that DBZ doesn't completely deserve its accolades, but it does appear a bit primitive. The colour quality, line-art and aesthetic will be a shock to younger viewers who might be visiting this beloved property for the first time. For those that grew up on the show - which is a good chunk of us at STARBURST - nostalgia

eases all the qualms and irons out the kinks.

The Season Two collection is divided into distinct segments, with the start mired in the tedium of the Ginyu Captain arc. Its combination of irritating baddies and frankly dull fights make it hard slog to the good stuff of the wider Frieza arc. While Goku is in transit and training in 100 times gravity, Gohan, Krillin, Bulma and Vegeta quibble over the seven Dragon Balls. Vegeta, ever the ego maniac, is still desperate to achieve immortality. The others, meanwhile, are just trying to bring back their dead friends from the first series. Never mind all that, the real highlight is the spectacular punch-up between Goku and Frieza.

Choosing a favourite DBZ baddie is like asking someone to pick a preferred Star Trek captain, but Frieza is certainly a compelling first pick. Charismatic, captivating and androgynous, he's an adversary desperate to showcase his bountiful vocabulary and power.

The battle royale begins in the primordial green haze of planet Namek, where Gohan, Krillin and even Vegeta struggle to deal with Frieza on the cusp

of his second form. It's not until Goku finally arrives that the series reveals its true strength and intent, and the complexities of power levels and punches are in full swing. The enduring appeal of these characters is symbiotically linked to the action sequences. It's characterisation by combat, and the dross of adrenaline and the flexing of muscles is a winning formula that saw the show through to its conclusion.

As Namek falls into oblivion around them, and the rapturous red and the forked lighting a brilliant illumination, the climax of Goku and Frieza's apocalyptic brawl is left somewhat punctured by the abrupt ending to the collection. At best, it's an excuse to fork out for the next one on release.

No version of Dragon Ball Z can ever compare to the version that exists in the collective fog of our childhoods, but Kai does a pretty decent job all the same.

Extras: Cast Interview / Textless opening and closing / Trailers

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

+++++++ 8

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COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

Photo: Wojciech Zuchowski Photography



Photo: Kevin Pack Photography

Phillipa Dickinson is known as PIPA WOLF to the UK cosplay community and has created some rather stunning costumes that we just had to share with you...

STARBURST: How did you get into cosplay?

Pipa Wolf: I discovered cosplay about two years ago. I've always been a fan of dressing up and I was in the theatre when I was younger, so progressively my love of costumes and pantomime met with my love of video games. Once I started at University studying Games Design, I missed my fine art background and sculpture and wanted to do something still relating to my university work as a side project. It all just combined at once and I discovered the world of cosplay!

What is your favourite element of the community?

I live in Manchester, UK, and I've somehow gained friends all across the UK and some in America and Europe that I've never met. The cosplay community is this crazy web of people where everyone seems to know everyone else and it's incredibly easy to meet people and have fun.

What's the greatest challenge facing cosplay now that it's so popular?

Cosplay becoming popular has led to 'cosplay celebrities', and a lot of the time I think that the fans and community

forget that they're just cosplayers. They sit around in their pyjamas and eat crisps and have had hardly any sleep to put together a costume just like everyone else. I've seen so many other cosplayers be insulted or berated because people think they will never see it and it's somehow okay because they're 'famous'. It's unfair and it's bullying. I think the real challenge facing cosplay now is for the cosplayers themselves to remember that everyone else is a real person too and deserves respect.

What is your build process?

I like to research, a lot. My builds start off with a massive amount of research and figuring out how I'm going to make or do something; I spend a lot of time totalling up costs and sourcing materials. I then just sort of jump in the deep end and get going. I like to start with the biggest or most complicated part and get it out of the way. Everything is done in stages, too, so I build everything, then prime it all, then paint it all, then do the sewing, then the props and unnecessary stuff is last.

What has been your most difficult costume?
Protoss Kerrigan. Oh man, that costume



Photo: Smallfry Creations

really took hell on me and it's nowhere near done. I still have a load more work to go on it and the whole thing needs reworking a lot. I'm actually thinking of making traditional Kerrigan and ditching a lot of the design!

What costume do you really want to make?

Diva Plavalaguna from *The Fifth Element* is my dream costume. I'm also really wanting to make a tree-based costume, I'm torn between a Leshen (*The Witcher*) and Treant Protector (*Dota 2*).

How important is getting into the role?

For stage work, competitions and photos, very important, as it really gives a great feel for the character and adds a whole different dimension. Suddenly, it stops being a costume and becomes something more. For the con floor, not so much, people don't expect you to be in the role. However, I have a great friend called Danny who cosplays as the Penguin from Batman and is consistently in character for every second of the con and it's absolutely incredible, he pulls it off

perfectly and you start to wonder if it is actually a costume for a few seconds!

What advice do you have for new cosplayers?

No costume is worth getting upset over. Seriously. It's 3am and it's not finished? Go to bed and get some sleep, you'll be at another con in a few months and you most likely have something else to wear. I've ditched costumes and gone to bed. I've been stressed and tired and upset, and costumes make it much worse if you're not physically and mentally prepared to wear them for 8 hours. No one will be disappointed, no one will think any less of you; they're just excited to see you, go and have fun. And it's a guarantee that in a year, you will look back at your old stuff and laugh to yourself about what was so wrong with it and how your skills have improved. Just enjoy the con and all the events; a con isn't made by a good costume, it's made by you and your friends.

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

More of Pipa's work can be found at:
pipawolf.deviantart.com.



Photo: Karen Berry Photography

READER'S COSPLAY "TIFFANY AMBER"

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Tiffany Amber: Cosplay is such a diverse and beautiful art that upon seeing the marvellous concepts in games, movies, and shows, I had this passion to depict these characters in reality. As for when I began, it all started about three years ago when I saw videos of people at these cosplay events having fun. There was this appeal to seeing the world in such a new light and being someone else for a day that I decided to continue to bring these characters to life.

What is your favourite character to dress as?

My favourite cosplay so far is definitely my Coronation Elsa! It is so brilliantly detailed and always a convention favourite! Plus, children believe that I'm just as magical as the characters in movies. The dress itself has a beautiful 8-foot cape, sparkling crown, and glittering snowflake props. All in all, it adds a sort of elegance to the character.

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

Depending on the size and complexity of the costume, time spent making them differs. For larger cosplays needing detailed armour or a specially designed dress, these take anywhere from six months to a year. As for smaller cosplays with simpler designs, these take about one to three months. It all depends on what materials you have available and how skilled you are in the certain task. At times, there were processes I was unaware of and as such, I had to consult professionals or look up tutorials. There were also instances in which I had to order



Photo: www.facebook.com/TravisScotkaPhotography

certain items from other countries and they usually had a lengthy delivery time. All in all, no matter how long a cosplay takes to come together, the end product makes the challenges worthwhile.

WORDS: MARTIN UNSWORTH

You can find out more about
Tiffany Amber at her Facebook page:
[facebook.com/coffeeshopcharisma](https://www.facebook.com/coffeeshopcharisma)
and follow on Instagram:
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Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

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PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



BLACK OPS III Won't Have Campaign on PS3 and 360

In what has to be seen as a strike against Activision, the upcoming **Black Ops III** will not feature a campaign mode on last generation hardware, which begs the question of why the game is being developed at all for the PS3 and 360.

The reasoning is that the developers couldn't recreate the experience that is going to be offered to Xbox One and PS4 players, which makes you wonder how they still managed to get the online component in there.

This just smacks of laziness and an effort to pull in as many sales as possible in the hopes that many **Call of Duty** fans using the last generation of hardware won't realise there is no campaign until it's too late. Of course, those who only play for the online modes probably won't care all that much.

Bale's BATMAN Suit Coming to ARKHAM KNIGHT

It has been confirmed that Christian Bale's Batman suit - from the **Dark Knight** series of movies - is going to be made available to players of **Arkham Knight** at some point before the end of the year.

Apparently, there has been enormous fan pressure to get the suit into the game, which shows that popular demand can lead to positive outcomes. Assuming you're happy to pay whatever price they charge for you to download the suit in the first place, of course.

COMING SOON



JUST CAUSE 3

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1ST

The Just Cause series has always managed to stay just the right side of ridiculous to make for a good gaming experience, and the third in the series looks set to keep up that trend. Players will once again take control of Rico Rodriguez, who has now left the agency and returned home. Expect more of the creatively destructive gameplay that was emphasised by the second game, only this time there is some next-gen sheen and some more complex mapping on offer.

COMING SOON



TRACKMANIA TURBO

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 27TH

The little known TrackMania series might be able to spark a little interest with Turbo, as it is touted as being able to support use of the Project Morpheus VR device, at least on the PS4. With 200 tracks and a less than serious approach to the sport of racing, it might make a pretty decent buy in its own right as well. Better yet, it also features a handy track editor so if you get bored of the main game you can always spend a little bit of time having a tinker.

New HITMAN Delayed

It's hard to claim that anticipation for the latest **Hitman** game is running high, particularly after **Absolution** managed to take away much of what made the series charming. It wasn't a terrible game, by any means, but it could best be described using the word 'meh'.

Still, there is a chance that IO Interactive will get it right again this time around, so it is good to see that they will be taking the extra time to try and do so.

Unfortunately, the delay means the Christmas period is going to look a little emptier for gaming fans, as the game has shifted from a December release down to March 2016, but as long as the product itself is good we doubt too many people will mind the extra wait.

STAR FOX ZERO Delayed

We go from one delay to another as Nintendo has announced that the upcoming **Star Fox Zero** has also hit a few snags during development and will be delayed until 2016.

The game, which was meant to ship out at the end of November, has been pulled back as the team want a little bit more time to work on what they call the 'unprecedented discovery' offered to players as a result of the two-screen system used by the Wii U.

Hopefully, that's positive news and the game will end up returning the humble Fox to the lofty perch he used to occupy back in the days of **Lylat Wars** and **Starwing**.

Release Date Set for DARK SOULS 3

There are some people who just can't get enough of the gaming torture offered by the **Dark Souls** series, which is no bad thing by any means. Those people will be delighted to hear that the third game will be making its way to the Xbox One and PS4.

A release date of April 2016 has been set, though we would not be surprised if that gets pushed back a little bit. The game promises to offer more of the intense difficulty that has made the others in the series so popular, so look for this to be a sleeper hit in the early months of spring.

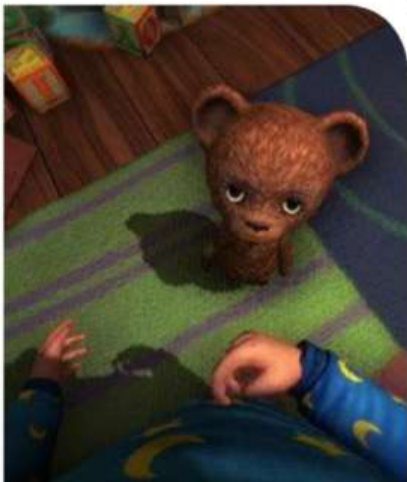
Vita Failure Blamed on Mobile

Sony has never quite been able to make the dent in the handheld market that they hoped they would, and the emergence of better mobile technology has made it even more difficult to convince people that they need a handheld to go along with their smartphone.

That's the reasoning that Sony has used to explain the failure of their Vita, which has only managed to shift 5 million units since its launch 4 years ago. SCE Worldwide President Shuhei Yoshida spoke at the recent EGX Conference, commenting: *People have mobile phones and it's so easy to play games on smartphones. And many games on smartphones are free, or free to start... The climate is not healthy for now because of the huge dominance of mobile gaming.*

It is an unfortunate commentary on the state of the industry when the tosh that tends to make its way to mobile phones can do such a number on a decent handheld.

COMING SOON



AMONG THE SLEEP

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 10TH

This has to be one of the most disturbing entries Pixel Juice has had the pleasure of introducing. Krillbite Studios have added a twist to the psychological horror genre by putting you squarely in the romper suit of a toddling two year old. Seriously... Needless to say this is something to look forward to through curiosity alone.

COMING SOON



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX SIEGE

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE, PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 1ST

The Rainbow Six series has always been good for tactical shooting enthusiasts - some of the recent entries notwithstanding - and it looks like Siege is going to bring the games back to what brought them to the dance. Players take control of a member of the special Rainbow unit, which is tasked with countering terrorist threats. Look for some interesting situations and an FPS that requires a little bit more thought than many of the run n gun games that the industry seems to thrive on these days.

Seven Million Amiibo Figures Sold in the States

We don't really get the whole amiibo craze, but Nintendo will be more than happy to leave old fogies like us in the dark after it was announced that the company has managed to sell seven million of the little figures since they were first introduced to the United States.

The packs, which were first released in the US back in November, have continued to grow in popularity, with new ones tending to be snapped up extremely quickly. This explains the many Nintendo games that are making use of amiibo compatibility and may even help the company claw back some of the losses made on the Wii U.

Video Game Voice Actors May Strike

There are some rumours doing the rounds that SAG-AFTRA, which is the union that represents video game voice actors, might be heading towards the decision to have their members strike in protest against the publishers that they are currently partnered to.

The contract between SAG-AFTRA and the publishers they work with ended in 2014, and there has been a lot of discussion about the terms the next one should include. Chief amongst the items of concern appears to be the fact that voice actors don't get paid bonus royalties if a game does particularly well.

Hopefully, the contract problems will get hashed out pretty soon, or we may be back on our way to the days of the silent protagonist.

POK MON Mobile Game Announced

Nintendo has announced a mobile game that will allow players to catch **Pok mon** in the real world. Everything about that sentence is wonderful.

The app will let you see and capture **Pok mon** in everyday environments, with Nintendo even announcing the development of a watch that will vibrate whenever you get near an area with a **Pok mon**, so you know it's time to search.

It wasn't long ago that we looked at Nintendo's new move into the mobile gaming sector with some amount of consternation, but if the company keeps making moves like this one we can only see more great things on the horizon. This is frankly an extremely refreshing concept in the stagnant world of mobile gaming.

Konami May No Longer Release AAA Titles

There are even more rumours swirling around Konami following the release of **The Phantom Pain**, with the latest claiming that the company are looking to move away from developing AAA titles entirely.

For those not keeping score, that would mean no more **Castlevania**, **Silent Hill** or **Metal Gear Solid** in the future, with the **Pro Evolution Soccer** series also in doubt.

Now it is important to note that nothing has been confirmed just yet, so we don't want to jump the gun here. However, if this turns out to be true it will be a very sad day for the industry to lose one of the companies that really helped build it into what it has become.



SYSTEM SHOCK Comes to GOG.com

Good Old Games has long been doing stellar work in bringing some of the old PC classics to a modern audience, but they may well have outdone themselves this time. **System Shock: Enhanced Edition** has finally found its way onto the service, which is great news for players who have wanted to experience the game for years but have never been able to find a version that runs on more recent hardware.

Any fans of the **BioShock** games need to check this out, as they will note a lot of similarities. The second **System Shock** refined the formula even more, of course, but lovers of retro gaming will want to check out this classic now that it has finally been made available.

COMING SOON



ANIMAL CROSSING: AMIIBO FESTIVAL

PLATFORM: Wii U

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 31ST

Those expecting something like the normal *Animal Crossing* games, only involving amiibos, are going to be a little disappointed with this, as *Amiibo Festival* looks set to be more like the *Mario Party* series than anything else. The game is apparently an unexpected spin-off from the main series, which roughly translates as an attempt to make as much money as possible from amiibos, but it should at least be fun, so if you're already into the amiibo thing, it might make a good addition to your collection.

COMING SOON



XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

PLATFORM: WII U

RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 4TH

Japanese gamers have had their hands on *Xenoblade Chronicles X* since April and the game has received some pretty damn good reviews, so we are hoping that the upcoming western release lives up to the promise. There aren't many JRPGs on the Wii U, so fans of the genre should definitely check this out. With a plot set almost forty years into the future, involving an apocalyptic event and space travel, it's sure to find a following amongst the sci-fi fandom somewhere.

FALLOUT 4 s Script is Absolutely Massive

The upcoming **Fallout 4** is one of the biggest gaming releases of 2015, so Bethesda has to make sure they get it right. Early signs are promising, as the company has claimed that the script for the new game is larger than that of **Fallout 3** and **Skyrim** combined.

That should be a very positive sign in regards to the size of the game, in addition to suggesting that the dialogue is going to be a little more complex this time around.

Apparently, the company has had to record 110,000 lines of dialogue, so it will be interesting to see if they have managed to snag more than five voice actors for the minor roles this time around.

Nintendo Announce their New President

Following the sad passing of Satoru Iwata, all eyes have been on Nintendo to see who the company would name as the great man's successor. In mid-September we got our answer when former head of Nintendo of America Tatsumi Kimishima was announced as the man who would take over the role.

The appointment may rankle gaming fans, as Kimishima doesn't have the background in games development that Iwata brought to the table, so it will be interesting to see how he fares in his new role. Perhaps his business acumen will help the company to make wiser, if less interesting, decisions about their future.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

DEVELOPER: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS / PUBLISHER: KONAMI / PLATFORM: PC, PS3, PS4, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If the first Metal Gear Solid games felt like a fresh beginning for stealth-action games, then The Phantom Pain has a sense of finality to it. It refines the gameplay mechanics in dynamic fashion, it has a large open world for you to explore, and it perfectly completes the story that has long been established back in 1987. For all intents and purposes, this is arguably the best stealth-action game of all time, as well as being one of the best open-world games ever made. It is an incredibly strong Game of the Year contender in an already pretty strong year for games. Continuing from the events of the MGSV prologue Ground Zeroes, Mother Base has been destroyed and it's up to Punished "Venom" Snake AKA Big Boss to rebuild what has been lost whilst also seeking revenge against Cipher and its new taskforce XOF led by new big bad Skull Face.

A fantastic setup at the beginning lets you know what kind of world you're dealing with and what you are going to continue to see later on in the game's story. From there on in, a gameplay plethora is unleashed at your disposal and it is masterfully crafted. You can approach any situation using a variety of techniques and tactics that are fun and unique in their own way, like going in all guns blazing or instead going for the classic stealth approach, and you have countless weapons and gadgets to choose from on top of that. Even if you're not a fan

of Metal Gear Solid or stealth games in general, this will change your mind.

Also, even though you have the option of going in alone, you can have Big Boss team up with any buddy you want, with particular favourites being the loyal D-Dog and the silent-yet-deadly and beautiful assassin Quiet (a beautifully nuanced performance by Stefanie Joosten), who is particularly handy during the toughest of missions. You get to manage and customise your own private military corporation, the Diamond Dogs, which involves staff recruitment, base management and much more, almost playing out like a meta game-within-a-game.

Whilst the story may not be the most exciting aspect, it definitely tackles weighty and powerful themes, covering real-world atrocities like genocide, racism, biological warfare, PTSD from war, and the idea of children being sent into war. This game can really surprise you as it goes from serious and gritty tones to the fantastical and almost supernatural; it's an impossible yet impressive feat and is something that Kojima is a master at creating. There are 50 main story missions, as well as 157 side ops, amounting to 60+ hours of gameplay, which is an insane amount of value for your money.

Admittedly, there are minor niggles, which do pale in comparison to the high quality set within The Phantom Pain. Skull Face was a bit of a disappointing villain after the massive

hype and build-up, and the boss battles are relatively easy and not that challenging. The biggest of issues, though, lie within Chapter 2, which feels rushed, grinding and very repetitious as it has you replaying enhanced and harder versions of previous missions. The fact that you have to play these missions so that you can have the full satisfying ending makes it all the more extraneous, and that's essentially what YouTube is there for nowadays anyway. It's clear that the apparent behind-the-scenes feud between Kojima and Konami affected Kojima's original vision of the game at around this section, and it has been confirmed that major chunks of the original narrative were taken out and sold exclusively to Special/Collector's Edition buyers. Seriously!?

Despite those small niggles, this is better than most games out there currently on the market. If this is indeed Hideo Kojima's last Metal Gear Solid game, then he'll have left the series on a high note. It is the biggest game in the franchise to date, not just in its map size, but in the wide range of gameplay, fascinating selection of characters and its incredibly polished attention to detail. Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain is an outstanding game on almost every level.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



UNDERTALE

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: TOBYFOX / PLATFORM: PC, MAC/ RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Over the past few years choice has become a key selling point in gaming. Whether it's your moral standing or shaping the entire story it's the flavour of the era, and we've seen entire development houses built upon selling this to players. However, all too often this comes down to a veneer of freedom, and following a series of narrative railroads to a conclusion. Undertale bucks this trend by not only giving the players the ability to win without

harming a single person, but also by challenging the very nature of save scumming.

The story here is oddly Earthbound-esque, as you play the role of a child trapped in an underground realm of monsters. Your task is to escape to the surface or find a way to survive, but that in itself quickly proves to be a vehicle for the game's true story.

The first thing to note is how the game alters over time.

No matter how many times you complete it, things will rapidly alter. Go in and choose one option, then the other at a later date? The game will know and you will be called out on it. This results in more complex narrative threads as time goes by and builds upon its theme of pacifism. While you can fight, you can slaughter your way through entire levels, there is always the option to talk your way out of even random encounters. The very act of fighting itself turns into a strange mix of bullet hell elements with RPG screens, focusing as much upon timing and choice as quick reflexes. However, the rewards are crafted in such a way that even basic terms such as EXP take on a very dark meaning should you choose to rely upon your past knowledge of RPGs. Suffice to say, this is certainly quite a surreal experience.

Unfortunately for Undertale, its greatest strength proves to be a double-edged sword. In the developer's determination to carry over so many thematic design choices and elements from yesteryear, it can seem clunky and ill-conceived. There's a definite learning curve to be

found in getting used to the bizarre nature of the game's combat, and even the storytelling is extremely minimal. That's a big part of its charm of course, but like Dwarf Fortress, you might have trouble seeing the fascinating concepts through the intentionally archaic design.

For all the good and bad present, Undertale proves to be one of those select few wonders of gaming a person should play at least once in their lifetime. Whether you enjoy it or not, what it accomplishes and the ideas on hand are so fascinating and oddly charming that it easily stands out from its contemporaries.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★ 8



JOTUN

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: THUNDER LOTUS GAMES / PLATFORM: PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

At its core, Jotun can be seen as the other side of the same coin as Dust: An Elysian Tale. Both succeeded thanks to crowd funding, both focus upon rapid combat against countless foes, and both retain a very distinct hand-drawn artistic style. The difference here is that Jotun opts less for the high flying, rapid attacks seen in Devil May Cry in favour of a more methodical Dark Souls approach.

Immersed in Norse mythology, you play as Thora, whose life as a warrior comes

to an inglorious end as she is drowned beneath the sea. Thanks to her unfortunate fate, she is promptly tasked with impressing the gods and earning her place in Valhalla. Unfortunately for her, this means hunting down and slaying the legendary Jotun.

The most distinctive point which immediately captivates the player is its atmosphere. Waking between the nine realms and striding forth to see Yggdrasil dominating the horizon creates a true sense

of wonder, one enforced by the game's beautiful score and aesthetic, and it sets the tone to come. Whether you're traversing the void between realms or locked in combat with a being made of pure thunder, Jotun never fails to look anything short of absolutely stellar and builds a real atmosphere of mysticism. This is further hit home by a well-rounded combat system, which proves to be ever challenging and offers no shortage of foes to combat.

The Jotun themselves are tied into the elements and earth, offering no shortage of variety and offering an experience akin to Shadow of the Colossus sprawling combat against vast foes. Each one is a puzzle and needs to be approached in exactly the right way, but between these it never fails to offer a variety of smaller mini-bosses and enemies, each of which requires careful timing and strikes to bring down. Unfortunately however, this last point proves to be a strength and a weakness, largely thanks to the stylistic choice. To give it a distinct animated look of older generations, the movements skip certain

frames at a time. This oddly works in the game's favour, but it makes timing attacks a far steeper learning curve and moments where you are caught out can seem cheap. The game's brief length and lack of real replay value also means this is short but very sweet, and those after something of greater substance might feel underwhelmed by the end.

Jotun ultimately proves to be fun but very flawed, and it's likely to be quite a divisive game. If you like what you see, you're bound to enjoy it, but still think carefully before making a purchase.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★ 7





SOMA

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: FRICTIONAL GAMES / PLATFORM: PC, MAC, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's no exaggeration to say that Frictional Games redefined the Survival Horror genre. Thanks to both its thick atmosphere and deadly foes, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* spearheaded the revolution still going on today, with its concepts present in indie and AAA releases alike. After handing over *Amnesia* to The Chinese Room, Frictional have shifted their focus from fantasy

to full blown science fiction. The result is an astounding masterpiece, and the game all future horror releases should be measured against.

The story here still carries traces of Frictional's last series, with the protagonist suffering from a hazy memory. Unlike before, you know exactly who you are, but not how you suddenly jumped from Toronto

in 2015 to a decaying undersea base. The world has gone to hell in the meantime, and everyone left is suffering from a strange case of identity crisis.

The first thing which hits you from the very start is the visual and sound design of the research facility. Trading in the Lovecraftian thematic for Cronenbergian visuals sprinkled with the odd H.R. Giger-inspired body horror, *SOMA* is extremely unsettling from the start. Even the grimy, decaying nature of the station, crawling with unknown life will keep you on edge long before any monsters appear. Many of the old mechanical tropes remain the same, but they have a new edge to them. Rather than reading your journal or stumbling upon old memories, you can see directly into the past, interacting with objects to understand how everything fell apart. However, many of the old tactics of hiding in cupboards or barricading areas won't work, which helps keep players on their toes.

While the mechanical intensity and visual design will draw people in, what truly elevates *SOMA* is the

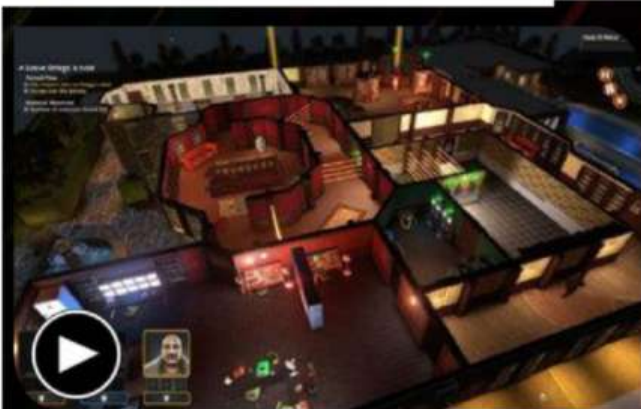
substance behind it. Rather than an excuse to see horror set pieces, *SOMA*'s story is more in line with Ray Bradbury or Philip K. Dick. Some have jokingly called this *Bioshock* as envisioned by Harlan Ellison, but that proves to be surprisingly on point. While it might be a game about being chased by monsters, that doesn't detract from its more introspective moments.

If there is a flaw to be found, its ill-paced start and surprisingly linear nature make for a weaker opening than many might have expected. What's more is that the monsters themselves too often seemed rather like harassing invaders than life threatening abominations, with visual trickery in particular proving more annoying than scary. However, this soon picks up and you gradually grow to appreciate the haunting depths of *SOMA*'s world.

At such high quality at such a cheap price, this is most definitely an essential purchase for this year.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★ 9



CROOKZ: THE BIG HEIST

DEVELOPER: SKILLTREE STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: KALYPSO MEDIA DIGITAL / FORMAT: PC, MAC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The perfect heist. We've all dreamed of it, right? The thrills, the spills, the near moral certainty that the person you're stealing from is an arsehole, so karma's still good, yeah? Well dream no longer, as Kalypso Media releases its tactical heist-'em-up" *Crookz* (for those of you not familiar with the genre, *Crookz* is essentially a puzzle game. A bloody good puzzle game).

Set in an alternate San Francisco in the 1970s, after being betrayed by their crew's

boss, five disparate criminals (each with their own specific set of skills and attributes) later to become six once a robot gets involved! – set about on a caper of vengeance and grand larceny. The graphics are cartoony (deliberately so), perfect for the game and the larger than life stereotypes that inhabit it. The tutorial is clear and concise, setting up the background to the story whilst teaching you the mechanics of the game quickly. Once you're through this then it's into the main game. Initially you

start with two characters, the Foxy Brown-inspired Cleopatra (Runner) and the hippy locksmith Bishop – later picking up further characters as you go, but never being able to pick more than four for any one mission.

Each mission starts in the planning phase. This allows you to scope out the level, check cameras, door controls, guard routes and anything else relevant to your success. Once the mission starts you can pause at any time, allowing you to update plans as the situation changes. You've got an array of skills and tools at your disposal, but there's usually a pay-off – the crowbar will get you through the door, but it'll make a hell of a noise and risks alerting the guards. As you progress you gain experience and new skills (though sometimes these are just improved versions of skills you already have) to help you, which is a good job as the difficulty amps up soon enough. That's not to say the learning curve isn't fair, just that later in the game you'll need all the help you can get.

At 20 missions, this isn't the longest game, but it'll take up a fair amount of your time and once you start on the

challenge mode, you can spend as much time as you've got. It does suffer from the issue that at least one of the characters becomes superfluous as the game develops, with even their skills becoming more-or-less useless. This is annoying but not a massive problem in terms of enjoying the game.

Overall *Kalypso* have done a fine job with this entry to the heist genre. It's well thought out, has funky graphics, a cool soundtrack and even an appearance (vocally at least) from '70s porn legend Ron Jeremy – but mainly this game is a whole lot of fun to play. Pick up a copy, it'd be a crime not to.

ANIMAL JOHNS

★★★★★★★★★ 8



RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



current affairs (current in 1992, at least) making appearances throughout the various levels.

Gekisha Boy revels in its own silliness, resulting in a highly entertaining game that unfortunately remains mostly unheard of outside of its native Japan. An updated PS2 edition known as *Polaroid Pete* was advertised for release in the west (and even reviewed in a couple of places) in 2001, but it was mysteriously cancelled and ultimately never saw the light of day. If you're able to track the original version down though, it's highly recommended.

PSYCHO CHASER (1990)

Sticking with the PC Engine for a moment, here's another excellent title that escaped the attention of western audiences.

In *Psycho Chaser*, players control a RoboCop-style mech-man blasting his way through various vertically-scrolling levels in an attempt to track down and destroy some sort of rogue android. At least that's what I'm guessing the premise is, based on what happens in the game...

Each level contains a mid-boss and a main boss, along with the usual endless waves of enemies that you'd expect to find in any old shoot 'em up. Where *Psycho Chaser* differs from every other shmup, though, is in its weapon mechanics. Players are given four different weapons at the start of the game, with each one being capable of firing in different directions. This lends a strategic element to proceedings, as players are constantly



BIG IN JAPAN (BUT NOWHERE ELSE)...

Welcome back! Retro Bytes returns after a little break last month, so dry those tears because we've got a whole host of wacky games for your entertainment! We've spent the last few weeks wading through countless mahjong variants and completely unintelligible JRPGs (they're undoubtedly amazing, but unfortunately the language barrier is a bit of a problem for a lot of us westerners) to dig out some of the sillier and more obscure games that our Japanese cousins have mostly been keeping quiet, for reasons best known to themselves... On with the nonsense!

GEKIBO: GEKISHA BOY (1992)

Kicking things off this month is this side-scrolling photography game, released on the PC Engine (AKA TurboGrafx 16). Players take control of a photography student who has been set a series of outlandish assignments by the principal of his college. These assignments are basically an excuse for the developers to include a huge variety of improbable scenarios into the game, with higher scores and power-ups being awarded for photographing the most ridiculous situations in each of the eight levels.

Levels automatically scroll from left to right, and players use the D-pad to aim the camera around the screen. The D-pad also controls your character, though, so you really need to keep an eye on your surroundings while aiming to make sure you aren't about to walk into one of the many hazards that are

scattered around each level. Getting hit by enemies or obstacles results in film being lost from your camera, and once all the film runs out it's back to the office for a stern ticking off from the headmaster. Luckily, extra film is awarded for taking good photos so even if you take a bit of a battering, there's always a chance to build up your stock and complete the level.

This is definitely a game with a sense of humour, as it takes you through a huge variety of different levels full of unexpected (and usually at least mildly amusing) situations. Pedestrians fall off their roller skates, kissing couples chastise you for peering through their windows, innocent bystanders are obliterated by passing cars, and these are just some of the tamer goings-on you can expect to encounter. Pop culture references are all over the place, with famous figures from music, film, and even

forced to consider their position on the screen and choose the appropriate weapon to blast away the approaching swarms of enemy robots and gunfire. Each level scrolls along slightly faster than the last, with things getting more and more chaotic as you progress through the game, but the fluid movement, controls, plentiful power-ups, and ability to upgrade your weapons at the end of each level mean that you never feel overwhelmed.

Psycho Chaser might seem slightly primitive when compared to modern shooters, but considering it was released in 1990 and still stands the test of time 25 years later, the developers clearly did something right. File this one under begging for an update, but not holding our breath.

CURSE (1989)

While we're on the subject of shooters, let's give this one a quick mention seeing as it's been on the would-like-to-talk-about-but-only-for-a-minute list for a fair while now. *Curse* is a fairly short (and fairly easy) side-scrolling shoot 'em up on the Sega Mega Drive, set during a war between two alien races.

As is standard for this sort of game, all you need to do is blast away at the bad guys while avoiding enemy fire and environmental hazards. Similar to *Psycho Chaser*, though, *Curse* sets itself apart from many other shooters by employing some pretty fun to use and easy to master weapon mechanics. On top of the usual weapon power-ups, players are also able to collect up to two extra gun turrets which can be rotated around your ship at any time. The resulting gameplay can be best described as hectic, as you dart around the screen trying to avoid getting blown up while at the same time spinning your guns around to destroy the onslaught of alien ships.

Again, just like *Psycho Chaser*, *Curse* might struggle to grab the attention of modern gamers with its fairly simplistic



gameplay and relatively short length. It's immensely playable, though, and also features some pretty jazzy music that should score it a few points with fans of 16-bit bleeps and squelches. If we were giving scores out of 10, this one would get an 8. If you can find it, play it!

SPLATTERHOUSE: WANPAKU GRAFFITI (1989)

Many gamers will be familiar with the *Splatterhouse* series, starring a chap called Rick as the hockey-masked protagonist trying to make his way through a spooky monster-filled mansion to rescue his girlfriend. Most of the main entries in the series are known for featuring a foreboding atmosphere and copious amounts of blood and gore (in the uncensored versions, at least). Not this one though!

Wanpaku Graffiti is the lesser-known second entry in the series, released

exclusively in Japan on the family-friendly NES in 1989. Bright cartoony graphics are the order of the day here, and instead of trying to give players the willies, the developers chose to include a myriad of pop culture references (Japanese developers really did seem to love those back in the day!) and a whole host of horror movie parodies, mainly in the form of end of level bosses. There's the seemingly dead lady on a stretcher in a science lab who spews orange spider creatures from her stomach and the man who accidentally locks himself into a machine with a fly, vampire Michael Jackson. Comedy is very much at the forefront of this adventure, and it makes for a really enjoyable experience that doesn't come across anywhere even close to being quite as forced as many modern games have a tendency to do.

Gameplay-wise, gone is the serious brawling beat 'em up style of the original *Splatterhouse*, replaced here by a simple hit stuff with your axe mechanic, and there is quite a heavy focus on platforming, which is another unexpected departure for the series. A counter at the top of the screen constantly encourages you to kill a certain amount of bad guys in order to gain a few extra health points that will remain with you throughout the game, but this extra health can be lost if the player loses all of their lives and uses a password to return to a later point in the game. Fans of the main *Splatterhouse* games will get a kick out of seeing a slightly different interpretation of the series, and it should also appeal to anyone who enjoys a bit of good old-fashioned silliness.

So there we have it, just a small selection of some of Japan's greatest hidden treasures. There are plenty more of them out there, but coming to the end of the page means we'll have to save them for another time. Join us again next month to see what's on offer!



STARBURST

ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



favours certain types of breath weapon; the red dragon has flame, the blue works best with lightning and the copper dragon is all about toxic fumes and acidic spit. You can equip a dragon with the wrong sort of breath weapon, but the rules penalise you for it ever so slightly.

There are no factions in the game. Though in traditional *D&D* metallic dragons are good and chromatic dragons are evil, there's nothing to stop you from mixing up units to create your perfect fantasy army. I've personally always been a fan of the Green Dragon from the game, and though the green doesn't come in the starter set, it's worth the investment. On its own, it's a nice workhouse model, but they also work quite well as a horde. That said, the individual dragon types each have a specific feel that is in line with most *D&D* settings. Other dragons I've gotten to play with include gold and silver types. The gold is a great match for the red, but nipper and luckier. Cleverly, the design of the model matches up against red, so they look like they're always about to tear each other apart.

One of the nice things about *Attack Wing* is the way the dragons are dynamically posed and rather nicely painted (for pre-painted models). The plastic is rather rubbery and the pieces are quite tricky to modify, but for the lazy gamer it's ideal. The tokens are also nicely sturdy. The starter game also comes with quite a large box. If you're not worried about storing the models too carefully, you can shove several dragons and a small army into the box.

Rules-wise, the 'lowest level' (and therefore weaker) dragon goes first. Movement is done using a dial and revealed only when you have to execute your action.

As regular readers will know, I am a bit of a sucker for games that use the Flight Path system. This miniatures movement method first appeared in the excellent *Star Wars: X-Wing Miniatures Game*, produced by Fantasy Flight Games. The system uses special dials and templates to simulate flight and was so popular that rival company WizKids picked up the license so they could use the same system in their *Star Trek* game.

So when WizKids also picked up the license for a *D&D* minis game, it sort of made sense for them to stick with the winning formula. Obviously, if you've got a world-winning flight combat system and the rights to one of the best-known fantasy settings, there's only really one sort of game it's going to be. *D&D Attack Wing* is a miniatures combat game that focuses on dragon versus dragon combat (let's be honest; *Game of Thrones* has been promising us dragon duelling for years now and still hasn't delivered). Moving really nice little dragon models on the board might be the closest we get to that sort of awesome for quite a long while.

The starter set gives us three dragons to play with, divided into type by their colour.

We get a red, copper, and a blue dragon. Much like the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* games, the dragons can be upgraded. Of course, unlike the space games, these aren't missiles or anything like that. In addition to natural abilities, such as their breath weapons and claws, the dragons can cast spells, just like they can in *D&D*. Each colour of dragon



You use a movement template and special card on the base to do this. This means that there is a tense element where you're trying to second-guess your opponents. The dragons bite, slash and claw at each other, all the while trying to remain in motion and avoid being hit. The game uses a lot of tokens to keep track of all the little rules elements, but it's not so much complicated as involved. There are a lot of phases in the game, but each phase is simple to do. They can also land, which is suicide in a straight-up fight with other dragons, but handy when adding expansions.

Adding extra land units does change the dynamic a lot. For a start, it's difficult not to equip your dragons with the snatch power (which lets you grab units from the ground). Giants are rather fun; mostly they're around to provide siege engine-style support to your troops, but they can do mega amounts of damage to anything on the board. (Frost Giants are more adaptable than Stone giants and hopefully they will produce different types of giant types.) Basic troop types are also available; the sun elves and the hobgoblins are distinctive enough to make it worth having both types, but basically they're around to soak up damage. There is also a Sun Elf mage, who has an upgrade (well, a spell) that lets him fly. This sort of makes him a mobile siege unit, but at the same time, means he's also a delicious treat for any flying lizards that happen to be in the room at the time. Further expansions add fortification rules, and though you don't need scenery to play the game, the more you get into it the more tempting it is to build scenarios. A unit that's similar



to the mage are the wraiths, big scary flying ghosts that can do a fair amount of damage before getting incinerated by a passing dragon. *D&D* has lots of flying undead, so it's likely we'll see more of that sort of thing soon.

The expansions for the game also come with a scenario that adds atmosphere to the general *D&D*-ness of it. Both *WizKids* and *Wizards of the Coast* are very good at running in-store campaign support, and the themed tournaments for *D&D Attack Wing* are quite fun.

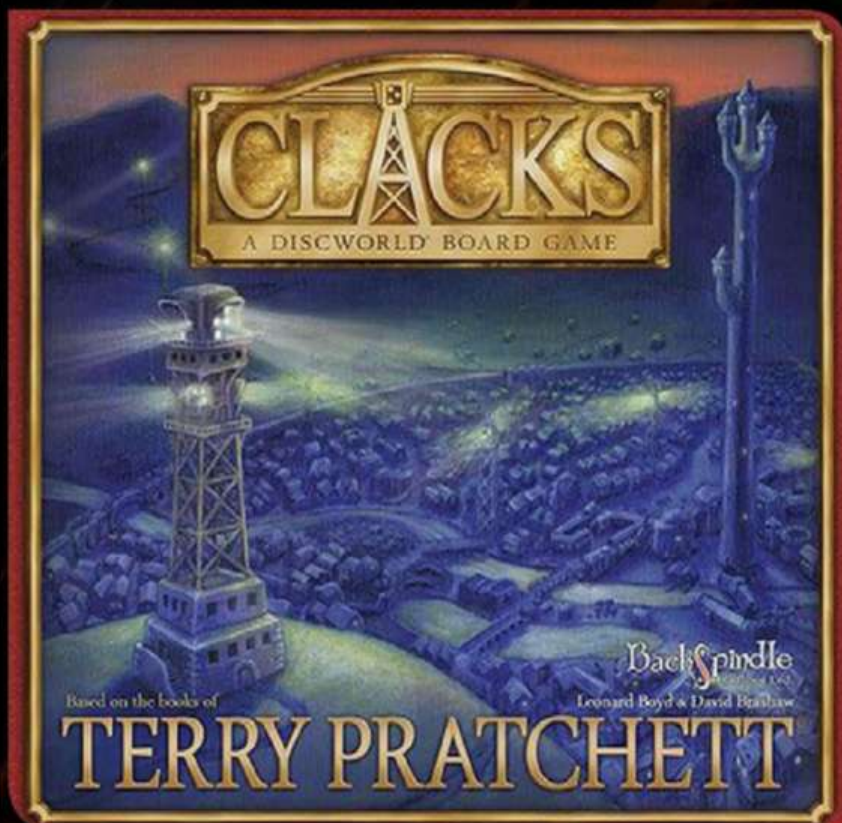
In other news, fans of *Call of Cthulhu* and *The X-Files* may be delighted to learn

that cult RPG *Delta Green* is currently seeking crowdfunding. The game originally came out as a sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu* in 1997 and almost instantly sold out; the book's scarcity making it even more popular. The game details a secret government conspiracy that fights the monsters of the Cthulhu mythos. Unfortunately, the American government has already been infiltrated by alien horrors that have them all over a barrel. It's an amazing setting, and the original writers have gotten together to turn it into a game in its own right. The game smashed its funding goals, and if you're a fan of horror and spy-fi, then you should totally check it out.

Speaking of Kickstarter, the massively successful campaign that everyone is currently talking about is *Wizard School*, which has been put together by Hank Green, who is one of half of the famous Vlog Brothers. The game looks okay, but nothing particularly special. The Kickstarter model is very similar to The Oatmeal's *Exploding Kittens* game (which did very well). The basic game is quite cheap; a fancy box is extra, and additional cards with adult humour cost even more. Much like *Exploding Kittens*, it's destined to make a huge splash when it comes out, and then will be shoved on a shelf to gather dust six months later.

Personally, I'm more excited by the release of *CLACKS!*, a *Discworld*-themed board game based on (you guessed it) the Clacks communication network, which is the *Discworld*'s version of the Internet. Alas, I won't be going to Essen to pick up my copy, so I'll have to wait until Christmas like everyone else (though if you are lucky enough to be going to the world's most important games fair this year, be aware that the Essen version of the game comes with a little model of Moist Von Lipwig, the hero of *Going Postal*, the book that *CLACKS!* is based on).

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WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



BBB MYSTERY

If years of pass the parcel games or cracker prizes have taught us anything, it is that, even if you end up with a plastic teaspoon or hair clip, the appeal of a mystery is almost impossible to turn down. However, when said mystery is a clothing box made up of goods worth £50 but available at half that price, this really ceases to be such a gamble and instead is just a must-buy. And the folks over at beltsbucklestees.com have delivered with their mystery box, whereby you choose the theme for your box (Movies and TV, Superheroes, Music and Band, Gaming, or Surprise Me) and receive at least four items in said box. Whether it is a gift for that special geek in your life or just a treat for little old you, this is one mystery worth discovering - and discovery has never been easier. Maybe Peter Griffin was right about the mystery box option after all

Although if it is bargains you are wanting, then beltsbucklestees.com have delivered two-fold with one of the best offers you are likely to find this side of the merchandising movie galaxy. Starting back at the beginning of October, the site kicked off their 9-day offer. It basically means that every 9 days the site will have 9 different T-shirt designs on offer for £9 each! The shirts are of varying design and inspired by film, TV, gaming and all manner of other interests that ought to appeal to we of STARBURST family (got the urge to insert a 'Hail Hydra' there for some reason). It's a chance to grab a bad-ass bargain shirt for a brilliant price, so keep checking on the 9 day, 9 designs, £9 offer page on their website and see what you can pick up!

MYSTERY BOX- £25
9 DAYS, 9 DESIGNS - £9 EACH
BOTH AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM





WHO WANTS SALT?

All you followers of the trend-setting Time Lord may be aware that he is back on the box for the brand new series of **Doctor Who** (see page 130 for more on that). Now, at this point many might say, *So why not celebrate by seeking out this shirt* or perhaps show you a new toy, but we here at STARBURST are suckers for something a little different. Plus, we've already used one of those lines. So with that said, how about you fans of the good Doctor complete your Who homeware collection with these nifty TARDIS salt and pepper shakers from **grindstore.com**. These condiment containers are affordable, brilliantly designed and guaranteed to rub salt in the wounds (sorry) of any fellow jealous Whovian who doesn't own a pair themselves.

DOCTOR WHO TARDIS SALT AND PEPPER SHAKERS - £7.99
AVAILABLE FROM **GRINDSTORE.COM**

MARV ATTACKS!

Seeing as the red planet has been back in cinematic focus thanks to the release of Ridley Scott's film adaptation of Andy Weir's **The Martian** (see our review on page 74), why not celebrate some of the planet's greatest ambassadors? Enter this shirt by Nemons on **redbubble.com**, which hails Tim Burton's cult satire **Mars Attacks!** but gives it an appropriately loony twist by recasting the film poster with Marvin the Martian, Bugs Bunny and K-9. So if you are one of the pint-sized, helmet-wearing spaceman's many followers, and have a thing for Burton's ack-acking aliens to boot, it's not unusual to say this shirt is definitely for you! There may be no earth-shattering kaboom but this piece of gear is one of the best ways to celebrate the lasting legacy of Mars in TV and film. Perhaps Scott missed a trick not having a Marvin cameo in the film - after all he got one in **Gravity**!

MARVIN THE MARTIAN MARS ATTACKS! SHIRT - £17.51
AVAILABLE FROM **REDBUBBLE.COM**



HAPPY HALLOWEEN

And it would be remiss of the Emporium not to mention some merchandise out there that celebrates the kind of knife-wielding, skin-tearing, limb-lopping movies that have come to define the Halloween season over the years. We speak, of course, of the franchise that brought the bleached Shatner mask-faced mentalist Michael Myers to life, **Halloween**. And there are numerous brilliant shirts celebrating the series from the brilliant Haddonfield High School class of 1978 (by creator glance from **teepublic.com**) to Impact Merchandising's can t-beat-the-classics iconic pumpkin knife slash poster shirt (available on **amazon.com**) that looks every bit as frightening today as it did back in '78.

Oh and remember folks, if you're looking ahead, November sees Friday the 13th come round once again and you know what that means? Look out for blue sweaters and hockey masks, because the Voorhees family may be out and about and no doubt will be found on a TV channel somewhere near you. So why not bring a bit of unkillable madman into your home this fearfully festive season with this 12-inch Halloween Jason Voorhees hanging decoration from **hauntedshop.com**? Perfect to go next to that pumpkin on your mantle.

HADDONFIELD HIGH SCHOOL T-SHIRT- \$20 USD
AVAILABLE FROM **TEEPUBLIC.COM**

HALLOWEEN NIGHT HE CAME HOME SHIRT-
\$15.79 - \$20.99 (DEPENDENT ON SIZE)
AVAILABLE FROM **AMAZON.COM**

JASON HANGING DECORATION
FOR HALLOWEEN- £12.99
AVAILABLE FROM **HAUNTEDSHOP.COM**



STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS & PHOTOS: TONY JONES

September 19th, 2015 and fans in their hundreds made their way to Slough for the now regular twice-yearly trip to Big Finish Day. This marked the seventh such event, which provided a full day's worth of entertainment.

As this is now the fourth time Big Finish Day has been held in the Copthorne Hotel, fans had clearly become very familiar with proceedings and the organisation from Tenth Planet Events was as robust as ever, with events running very much to time - or at least starting on time, even if co-executive producer (and voice of the Daleks) Nicholas Briggs has a tendency to overrun the allocated end of his sessions!

Each Big Finish Day has a main guest, and this time it was Colin Baker, the Sixth Doctor himself. Colin has recently appeared in a regeneration story, *The Sixth Doctor: The Last Adventure*, and several of his companions from that story were present too, including India Fisher (Charley Pollard) and Lisa Greenwood (Flip Jackson).

Unlike previous events, the main guest session was last in the programme rather than first up. This meant the day began with a panel marking the popular *The Omega Factor* [see STARBURST #416]. This was made up of Nick Briggs, David Richardson (Producer), Louise Jameson (Dr Anne Reynolds) and Natasha Gerson (Morag in the show and daughter of creator Jack Gerson). The panel discussed the recording of the recent box set (a second has been announced) and also various anecdotes about the recording of the 1970s TV show.

This was followed by a panel from Big Finish themselves that teased fans with trailers from several upcoming releases, including *The Prisoner*, *UNIT - Extinction* and *The Doom Coalition*. Although the last of these is an Eighth Doctor release, fans were delighted to hear Sylvester McCoy make a cameo as the Seventh Doctor.

Other panels included *Torchwood*, *Terrahawks*, *Third Doctor*, *Novel Adaptations*, and *The Early Adventures*. However, the day wasn't just about panels; the pre-function street was a continuous flow of three streams of fans; those moving in and out of the main room, those taking advantage of bargain pricing to pick up a few CDs and those queuing for autographs

from the many writers, actors, and others who helped pack the room out.

Other parts of the hotel hosted a writers room in which Simon Guerrier and others signed copies of *The Scientific Secrets of Doctor Who* and chatted to fans. Writers Simon Barnard and Paul Morris engaged several fans in conversation about their jointly written *Sixth Doctor* regeneration story, mostly debating whose part was the best (answer: they were both good!).

The packed programme ran through lunch, which meant it was easier to find space to catch up with friends over a quick bite to eat (ignoring the hotel prices). It was in the bar that STARBURST caught up with actor Elliot Chapman, who has been cast as Ben Jackson, companion to the first and second Doctor (the part originally played by the late Michael Craze). His first audio, *The Yes Men*, has just been released. He was clearly enjoying his second ever *Doctor Who* convention:

Today's been a real blast, I'm even recognising people from the first convention I did last year, Pandorica. Everyone's been really nice and positive about my playing Ben Jackson!

Unlike previous events, there was no cosplay competition, though plenty of people turned up variously dressed as versions of The Doctor, UNIT soldiers, Daleks and even a penguin! If there was a prize for obscurity, it would almost certainly have gone to the person dressed as Peter Cushing's film version of The Doctor.

Other convention artefacts included not one but two TARDISEs; one was set up by the hotel entrance alongside both a K9 model and the inevitable Dalek. This TARDIS sported a full copy of Colin Baker's most famous costume from the TV series. The second was on the stage area as a device for panellists to emerge from as they were introduced for the various talks.

STARBURST took the opportunity to catch up with James Goss, producer of the new *Torchwood* range, and Scott Handcock, director; chatting about the fan reaction to the return of the show, plans for the series and how they found recording with John

Barrowman while he is in the US, being directed by Skype. The conclusion is it all seems like organised chaos, but they are thoroughly enjoying themselves. James summed it up:

It's all been really great, and we thought we had it all under control until David [Richardson, producer] asked if we could release the second series immediately after the first one finished!

Like any good convention, there was much too much to do in the time. Among the other attractions were a separate room for formal photos with the main guests and another room focused on the *Dark Shadows* range (based on the 1960s US TV series of the same name). The event may be relatively full, but it was bustling as Lisa Greenwood confirmed:

When I first started as the assistant [Flip] it was all really quick and before I knew it, I was at a Big Finish Day in Barking. Since then I've done LA and Chicago, which makes this seem small, but it's lovely to meet the fans and get their ideas.

Lisa was one of the panellists for the final talk of the day - Colin Baker's Sixth Doctor panel. Colin took questions on everything from *I'm a Celebrity to MasterChef* (India Fisher, who plays companion Charley Pollard, does the voiceover for the cookery show). He thanked Big Finish for the way his character has been allowed to develop a new lease of life, and was in great (if somewhat cheeky) form.

Not only was the event in Slough a triumph, but Big Finish catered for their fans worldwide. The event was continuously tweeted, with the hashtag #bfd7 managing to trend in the UK during the day. Certain parts were also made available live via the *Periscope* streaming service. Next stop, January, when the guest of honour will be Sylvester McCoy. We look forward to seeing you there!

For more information on BIG FINISH DAY 8 on January 16th, 2016 head over to tenthplanetevents.co.uk.



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PAUL MOUNTIS



This month, we FEAR THE WALKING DEAD, say farewell to FALLING SKIES, and share some first impressions of the new series of DOCTOR WHO...

Five episodes in at the time of writing, and I'm still not really sure about **Fear the Walking Dead**. There's a great big fat question mark hanging over it from beginning to end: *why?* I don't really know why **Fear the Walking Dead** exists (beyond obvious and cynical financial reasons – parent show **The Walking Dead** is still just about the biggest genre show on the planet, so who can blame AMC for wanting to squeeze a bit more out of it until it squeaks and pops)? Robert Kirkman created **The Walking Dead** out of frustration at zombie movies that just stop after the regulation ninety-odd minutes of apocalyptic chaos and carnage; he wanted to know what happens afterwards, as the survivors continue to try to stay alive in a world swarming with the undead. In **The Walking Dead**, Kirkman dodged the actual collapse of civilisation and just pitched his characters into the business of keeping one step ahead of the walkers and other ruthless, corrupted human survivors who are just as deadly, if less predictable. Perhaps it's not unreasonable that Kirkman and co. might want to rewind a bit and actually show the audience what happened when society fell apart as the virus raged across the planet. And in that regard, **Fear The Walking Dead** (co-created by Kirkman and Dave Erickson) grips like a vice at first, its sense of the unfolding catastrophe building steadily across the first half of the show's brief run; episode one has been slated for its languid pace, but there's actually much subtlety in evidence for the patient; a constant background soundtrack of helicopters circling overhead and distant police sirens foster the general underlying impression that something's *not right*. Episodes Two and Three ratchet up the drama and the

tension and by Episode Five, we know we've reached the point of no return and that nothing's going to be the same again. But we seem to have skipped to the end a bit and a lot of what we were promised – the slow decay of the normal order of things – appears to have been swept aside in the rush towards bringing the world down and filling it with zombies. Which, of course, we've seen before time and again – and which isn't quite what we were promised from this new show.

You'll notice I've made no mention yet of the show's cast of characters. Here's where the show *really* falters when set alongside **The Walking Dead**. The parent show's characters originated in comic strip form and as such they're a naturally

larger-than-life bunch, from former-cop-turned-borderline-psycho Rick Grimes, crossbow-wielding survivalist Daryl, brave young buck Glenn, Michonne the sword-wielding zombie-decapitator, the ruthless and implacable Carol, and even Carrrrrrl the boy warrior. **FTWD** (come on, you know what it means, I've got a word count to keep an eye on) is supposed to be set in the same world, but its cast have none of the extravagances or extremes of the older show. Created for a different medium, they're realistic people in a real world – which makes them a boring and not hugely endearing bunch, and it's hard to imagine them rubbing shoulders with Rick and co. at some point in the future (which must be an irresistible temptation should **FTWD** survive beyond its already commissioned longer second season). I can't really warm to any of the **FTWD** cast because they're just so damned ordinary, and none of them have any real USP (apart from the rather irritating sweaty drug addict teen); they're just ordinary Americans who find themselves in an extraordinary situation. This is fine in a sense, because it's the apocalypse that has shaped the **Walking Dead** characters, and their experiences have turned them into who they are. This doesn't, unfortunately, help the **FTWD** bunch, who are just the usual bland, dysfunctional American stereotypes: high school counsellor Madison Clark and her teacher partner Travis Manawa, a brace of troubled teens, the partner's ex-wife, a few dull waifs and strays they meet on the way. It's rooted in a reality the parent show has long since eschewed and it's hard to really care much about any of them because, despite competent performances from the unknown cast, there's nothing distinctive about any of them.

Frustratingly, yet again the world ends off-stage and pretty quickly. The first few episodes nicely set up the escalating scenario and there are some tense sequences as Madison and her family try to understand exactly what's going on whilst dealing with their own personal



FEAR THE WALKING DEAD



FEAR THE WALKING DEAD

crises. But suddenly, by Episode Four, the authorities are setting up quarantine zones. By Episode Five, they're abandoning them and heading for the hills. Whatever happens in between and anywhere else in the world is a story left untold and sadly *that's* the story we end up wishing we were watching rather than this run-of-the-mill low-key yarn told from the perspective of just a handful of ordinary Joes.

So I suppose I'm a bit ambivalent about **FTWD** mainly because I'm still not really entirely sure quite why it exists or even, more pertinently, if it *needs* to exist. It doesn't seem to have fulfilled its original mission statement as it's galloped quite a bit sooner than I'd expected into much the same territory as **The Walking Dead** itself. Unless episode six veers off into completely new directions, the second series seems likely to end up at some point pretty much where *The Walking Dead* started meaning that next year we'll have two zombie apoc. series that are pretty much exactly the same (**Z Nation** being, of course, something rather more throwaway). It's a well-made show in itself, but it's hard not to wonder why Kirkman and co. were so keen to dramatise the initial spread of the virus if they really didn't have anything particularly new to bring to something that has been done just as competently in a zillion or more cheap straight-to-DVD movies. I fear that **Fear the Walking Dead** might ultimately end up as rather less than the sum of its parts...

FALLING SKIES

Although it never really amounted to very much in the sci-fi scheme of things and certainly isn't a show that will be remembered especially fondly if at all, I must doff my metaphorical cap to TNT's **Falling Skies** (Fox in the UK) as it shuffles into the night for the last time at the end of its fifth season.

Falling Skies was the invasion Earth series that made the prospect of

extraterrestrial domination somewhat underwhelming. For five years, Tom Mason (Noah Wyle) and his associated grimy sons and friends grubbed about in the mud shooting at multi-legged Skitters, robot Mechs and flying Black Hornets, trying to shrug off the yolk of alien oppression which had brought the planet and its people to its knees. But **Falling Skies** never really managed the trick of making all this thrilling, thought-provoking or original. The acting was always enthusiastic, the show always looked formidably damp and battle-weary, but the scripts wandered and rambled when they needed to be sharp and to the point. Plus the series had the frustrating habit of setting up epic season finales only to resolve them the following year in an infuriating with one bound he was free fashion. Season Five did, however, briefly appear to be trying to do something a bit different and even occasionally came close to fulfilling some of its long-untapped potential. As the 2nd Mass, our

bunch of mud-spattered misfit resistance, rallied for a final push against the Espheni aliens, the show broke away and focused on one of its slow-burning subplots; the festering enmity between Mason and gang-leader/reluctant resistance fighter Pope (Colin Cunningham), who finally went totally psycho when his girlfriend was killed and he blamed Mason, who was busy killing aliens elsewhere instead of rushing to her rescue. The tentative peace between the two fell apart and the resulting brittle stand-off, stretching across a handful of episodes, was promisingly intense but, disappointingly, never gave us the all-out confrontation that both characters deserved. Pope's story and indeed, Pope himself just fizzled away in the very last episode. A couple of standalone episodes (well, as standalone as **Falling Skies** could ever get) frustratingly introduced new characters with more dramatic potential than many of those who had populated the rest of the series, only to eventually do nothing much



FALLING SKIES

ALSO SCREENING



THE LIBRARIANS

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GRIMM

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CONTINUUM

The cult time-bending series returns for a truncated (six-episode) final season

From November 17th on Syfy UK

with them. As the show staggered towards its finale, much of the innovation and improvement of the first half of the season drained away, as the writers jumped through logic hoops in an attempt to give the show some sort of pay-off.

In the end, the final episode – the one that could have made sticking with this show for five years worthwhile – was a massive disappointment. Defeating the aliens involved nothing more than recycling the denouement of *Independence Day*, the bloodiest ever battle never happened as our heroes found themselves stumbling through underground tunnels beneath Washington in the dark and, worst of all, the potentially shocking death of a major frontline character was fumbled and compromised with typical *Falling Skies* mumbo jumbo reset storytelling.

With its fudged characters and story arcs and ideas that bent over backwards to make sense and yet still didn't, or were thrown away when something easier came along in the writers' room, *Falling Skies* never had the chance to spread



DOCTOR WHO

its wings and prove its worth, falling at the last and most important hurdle. For a while in Season Five, it really looked as if the show might fulfil its promise and ultimately come good. Because, in the final analysis, good was really all the show could ever aspire to be.

DOCTOR WHO

In the exciting climax to this year's two-part *Doctor Who* series opener, a repulsive and foul-smelling tide of effluent rose up from the Dalek sewers, swamped the Doctor's famous metal meannies and somehow blew up their city. It's a wonderful, if inadvertent, metaphor; *Doctor Who* has been drowning in shit for the last three or four years and this woeful, lamentable horror-show (not in a good way) of a two-parter is surely the most deserving recipient yet of a generous helping of Dalek doings and assorted decaying DNA to bring down the curtain on what can actually only charitably be described as a story.

You'll gather, I trust, that I'm unable to join in the general joyful squealing and cries of *best episodes evs* from the more resolutely flag-waving corners of the fan community as *Doctor Who* creaks back onto our screen. Despite keeping everything crossed that showrunner Steven Moffat might have pulled something decent out of his now clearly empty bag of tricks, *The Magician's Apprentice* and *The Witch's Familiar* were pretty much business as usual in the strange, twisted, un-*Doctor Who* place which is the Moffatverse. Arrogantly disregarding well-established wisdom (and plain TV common sense), which suggests that the first *Doctor Who* of a new series is a gentle reintroduction to the show's weird world and characters for that all-important casual audience, Moffat decided to give viewers a story predicated on intricate knowledge of a serial screened in 1975, packed his script with arcane bits of audience-baffling continuity alongside the usual teeth-grindingly embarrassing comedy skits. The Doctor playing electric guitar in *The Magician's Apprentice* sits right

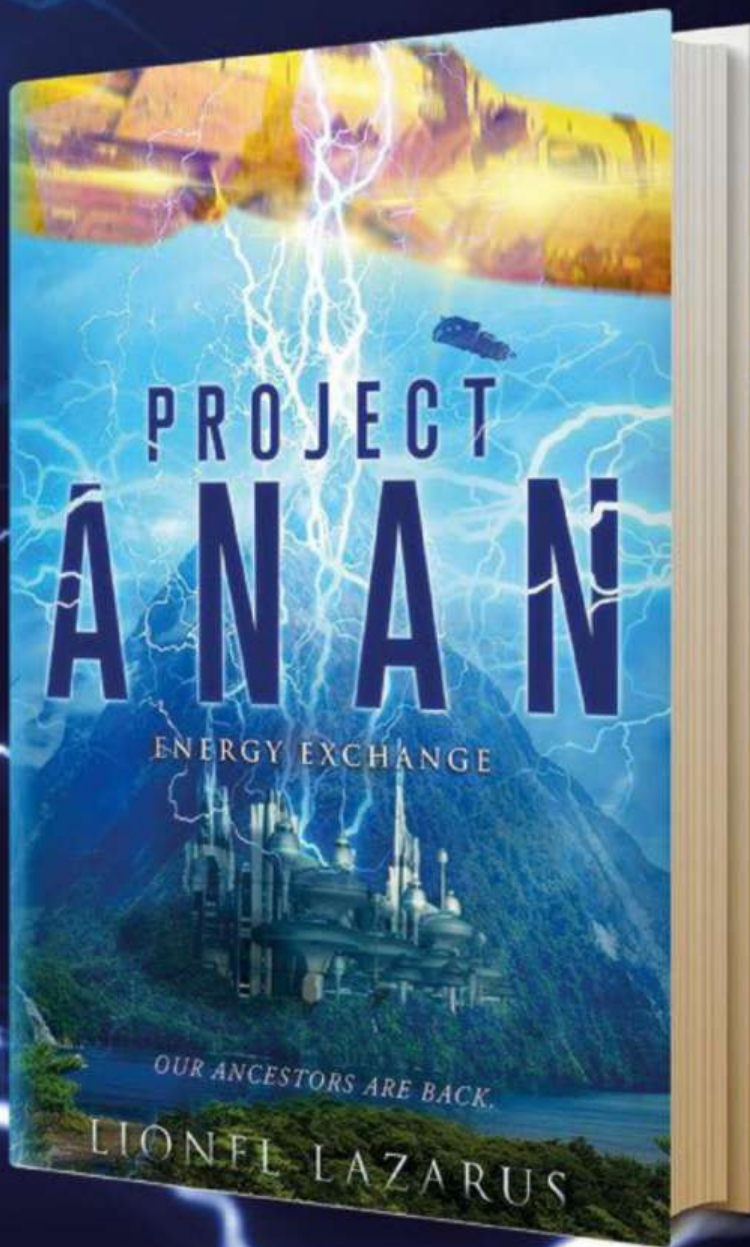
alongside Sylvester McCoy's spoon-playing in a list which I'm sure exists somewhere and plainly marked huge and potentially fatal creative mistakes in *Doctor Who* and the plot (such as it was) once again obsessed with exploring the myth of The Doctor at the expense of actually telling any sort of proper story at all. Same old, same old, in other words. The only difference this time being that around three million people don't think it's funny or entertaining anymore and the episodes were rewarded with *Doctor Who*'s lowest overnight UK ratings figures since the show returned in 2005, numbers worrying enough in a traditional mid-season slump, but devastating for a well-publicised series debut featuring the apparently endlessly popular, ratings-boosting Daleks too.

I'm not going to take a hatchet to these shocking episodes in any greater detail because there'd be precious little room for anything else in the magazine if I did and, to be honest, I just don't think I can be bothered anymore. As *Doctor Who* swirls down the pan and disappears around the U-bend, my heart (I have just the one) goes out to Peter Capaldi, a fine actor who, in his dream role, must surely have hoped for – and certainly deserves – better material than scenes which require him to spin around in Davros wheelchair, inexplicably drinking a cup of tea and squawking *I'm the Doctor!* every now and again. It's pitiful.

I'll revisit the series in a few issues to see if things have improved, but I don't hold out much hope. As things stand, Steven Moffat has effectively killed my love for *Doctor Who* and turned watching a show I've adored since the 1960s into at best a chore and at worst a physically agonising experience. More than that, he's ripped the heart and soul out of a cherished British institution and turned it into his own personal vapid, repetitive, one-dimensional sitcom playground. I barely recognise it as *Doctor Who* any more. Shame on you, Mr Moffat. Shame on you.

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount

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